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LONE PINE



LONE PINE

THE STORY OF A LOST MINE

By R. B. TOWNSHEND



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F

TO
MY FRIENDS IN SANTIAGO
RED AND WHITE
AND
IN MEMORY OF
A BRINDLED BULLDOG

I HAVE to thank Señor F. de Arteaga y Pereira, Reader of Spanish in the University of Oxford, for the Spanish version of Heine's poem which appears in Chapter XXIX.

A lone pine stands in the Northland
On a bald and barren height.
He sleeps, by the snows enfolded
In a mantle of wintry white.
He dreams of a lonely palm-tree,
Afar in the morning-land,
Consumed with unspoken longing
In a waste of burning sand.

After Heine.

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LONE PINE

LONE PINE

CHAPTER I

INDIAN LOVERS

A MOON just past its first quarter was shining on the Indian pueblo of Santiago, so that one side of the main street (it only boasted four) was in deep shadow, while on the other the mud-built houses were made almost beautiful by the silver light. The walls on the bright side were curiously barred with the slanting shadows cast by low, broad ladders, which led from storey to storey of the terrace-like buildings, and by the projecting ends of the beams which supported their flat roofs. Outside each house, clear away from the wall, stood a great clay oven, in shape exactly like a gigantic beehive as tall as a man. In the deepest shadow on the dark side of the street, between one of these ovens and the wall, something was crouching. The street was deserted, for the Indians, who practise the precept "early to bed and early to rise," had long ago lain down to sleep on their sheepskins. But if anyone had gone up to the crouching something, he would have found a young Indian, with a striped blanket drawn completely over and around him so as

to conceal everything except the keen eyes that peered watchfully out of the folds. There was no one to disturb him, however, and the bright moon of New Mexican skies sank lower and lower in the west, and yet he remained there motionless, except when now and again the night air, growing colder, caused the blanket to be gathered more closely to the body it was protecting.

Just as the moon dipped behind the western hills, the figure sprang up and darted forward. The long, untiring watch was over at last. From a hole in the opposite wall, a good deal higher than a man's head from the ground, a little hand and wrist were seen waving.

In a moment the boy—he was hardly more—was underneath. He threw back the blanket from his head, and it fell down to his waist, where it was supported by a belt, leaving his body and arms free. His answering hand crept up the cold, rough surface of the wall till at its utmost stretch he felt a smooth, warm skin rub against his finger-tips, and instantly the two hands interlocked.

"Is that you, Felipe?" breathed a low voice from inside.

"Yes, my love, it is," came back a whisper as low from the Indian boy who had waited so long and so patiently for his sweetheart's signal. "Why did you look so sad," he continued, "when you gave me the signal to-day? Is there anything new?"

"Oh, Felipe, yes," she sighed. "I do not know how to tell you. My father spoke to me this morning and said it should be in three days. He has sent for the padre to come. In three days, Felipe! What shall I do? I shall die!"

The young Indian groaned under his breath. "In



three days !” he said. “ Ah, that is too cruel ! Is it really true ? ”

“ Oh yes,” came the whispered answer. “ My father said he would beat me to death if I did not consent. I should not so much mind being beaten, Felipe—it would be for you ; but he would kill me, I believe. I am frightened.”

Felipe felt the shiver that ran through the finger-tips clasped in his. “ Do not be so afraid, Josefa,” he said, trying to keep up her courage. “ Can you not tell the padre that you hate old Ignacio and that you will not marry him ? ”

“ Yes,” replied she, “ but he will say, ‘ Oh, nonsense, nonsense ; girls are always afraid like that.’ As long as my father is cacique the padre is bound to please him to make sure of getting his dues. He ’ll do what my father wants. He will not mind me.”

“ There is only one thing for us to do,” said the boy ; “ we must run away together.”

“ But where ? ” said she, “ and how ? They will catch us, and they will beat us, and they will marry me all the same to that ugly old Ignacio. I hate him from the bottom of my heart ; and if ever he dares to try to master me, I ’ll do him a mischief.”

“ Ah, but he is going to bribe your father with three cows,” said her lover disconsolately. “ He can do it, too, easy enough. He is the very richest man of all the Eagles, and I suppose the Eagles are the strongest family in the pueblo next to the Snakes. Anyway the cacique always favours them, so he has a double reason for wanting to hand you over to that old miser. Alas ! I have no cows to give him, not even one little calf. We Turquoises are so few and so poor ! The cacique would never hear of your marrying one of us. He is so

proud of having married a Snake himself, that he thinks nobody good enough for his daughter who is n't able ——” He was silenced by the girl.

“Hush !” said she quickly in a smothered tone, “I hear him moving about in the farther room” ; and the Indian lad listened, motionless as a statue, with all the wary concentration of his race in the moment of danger.

The red Indian has often been represented as apathetic. He is not. His loves and his hatreds are intense, only, both by birth and bringing up, he is endowed with extraordinary power of controlling their expression. Underneath their outward self-restraint these simple folk of Santiago were capable enough of feeling all the emotions of humanity pulsing through their veins and plucking at their heart-strings. Felipe and Josefa, exchanging hand-clasps and vows of fidelity through a hole in an adobe wall, were as passionate and as miserable as if the little drama which meant so much to them was being played on the wider stage of the great world outside. When the girl whispered “hush” to her lover, both held their breath and listened, each conscious of the pulse that throbbed in the other’s hand. It was a noise from inside the house that had startled the girl. She could hear that someone in a farther room had got up and was throwing a stick of wood on the fire. With a gentle pressure her fingertips were withdrawn from her lover’s, and her hand disappeared back through the hole. Felipe sank down into the crouching position he had been in till she came, drawing the blanket over him for concealment and warmth as before. For nearly half an hour he remained perfectly still. Then a slight rubbing on the inner side of the wall became audible, and presently looking up he saw not a hand only, but a whole arm

reaching down to him from the opening. Up he sprang, and stretching himself on tiptoe against the wall he succeeded in bringing his lips up to the little hand, which he kissed silently again and again.

"It was my father," said she. "He must be asleep again now ; he lay down again quite soon. They put a new stone," she continued, "in the hand-mill to-day, for I have quite worn out the old one with grinding corn on it for my step-mother. But they have brought the old one into the storeroom here, and I have taken it to stand on, so that I can see you now if I take my hand in and put my head to the hole. But, Felipe, let us settle what to do."

"I've been thinking," said Felipe, "we must run ; we must. Of course it is no use for us to go to our padre. He is on their side, just as you say, so we will not go to him. We will try another padre, who has nothing to do with the pueblo and won't care for your father. I'll tell you. Let us go to Padre Trujillo at Ensenada. They say he is good and kind to his Indians. He will marry us. I have the money to pay his fee. When we are once married, my joy, we are safe. They cannot separate us when the padre has joined us for ever. They cannot do anything to us then ; our own padre himself would forbid it."

"We would be safe then, indeed," sighed Josefa. "Oh, if we could only manage it ! What shall we do for a horse ? the horse herd is away in the sierra, and they will not bring it down till Sunday."

"Sunday will be too late for us," said Felipe sadly. "We want a horse now, at once ; I could go out to the horse herd and get my father's horse if he would give me leave to get him. But you know this new captain of the horse herd is that bullying Rufino of the Eagles.

He and his helpers have the herd now on the other side of the Cerro de las Viboras, the Mountain of the Snakes. I'm sure they'd never let me have the horse unless my father gave them the order or came to fetch him himself. But he won't do that, I know; the horse is thin after the cold winter, and he wants him to eat green grass now and grow fat. It won't do."

"Ask El Americano, then," suggested the girl quickly, as if a sudden thought had struck her. "Yes, why don't you ask him? Ask Don Estevan to lend you a horse or a mule; you work for him, and he seems so friendly with you, perhaps he'll let you have one of his."

"What!" exclaimed the young Indian, "ask him! Ask Turquoise-eyes to lend a horse! Ask Sooshuamo to do that! That's no sort of use." He spoke hopelessly, as if surprised at her even thinking of such a thing.

El Americano, as the girl had first called him, otherwise known as Don Estevan or Sooshuamo, was a solitary white man, a prospector who had obtained permission to spend the past winter in the village of the Indians of Santiago, and by them was often referred to as El Americano, the American *par excellence*, because he was the only one within fifty miles.

"You might just ask him once, though," she persisted, in spite of Felipe's attitude. "Oh yes, Felipe, go and ask him. Do try. Go now. It can't do any harm even if he won't."

"But I know he won't," returned the boy, unconvinced; "and I shall have to tell him what it's for, and if I go and tell Sooshuamo our secret, what's to prevent him telling the chiefs? He's very friendly with them all."

"Oh, but of course you must n't tell him our plan," she answered; "we must keep that dark. But he's very kind to all our folk. Perhaps he'd do it for us out of kindness. It's all out of kindness, is n't it, that he's going to make the rocks fly away out of the acequia to-morrow? They say he's going to do a miracle for the pueblo. I heard my father talking about it."

"Yes, I know that," said Felipe; "I know he told me himself he would make the rocks jump out of the ditch, and that then we should have twice as much water as ever we had before. I know he's a good friend to us. But I know, too, he hates ever to lend any of his animals to any of us. He thinks we would ride them to death if he did. I will try him, though, anyway. I will beg very hard. Don't be afraid, dear heart; I will get one somehow, if you will really come—yes, if I have to take one of the Mexicans' horses."

"Oh no, not that!" cried she. "They will shoot you or hang you if you touch their horses. Don't do it. I will not go if you take a horse of the Mexicans. I would rather go afoot."

"No, dear heart, you could n't. It is n't possible. It is ten leagues to Ensenada from here, and we must do it between moonset and daylight, or they will catch us. Do not talk of going afoot. Trust me, I will get a horse. But you will really come, Josefa *mia*? Do you really mean it? What other woman would be so brave?"

"I do mean it, indeed," she answered. "Oh, how I wish we could be married here in our own church by the padre! but my father would n't hear of it. He would n't even let me speak to you, you know, or let me go out without being watched."

"Yes, I wish we could," said the young Indian wistfully. "I spoke to my father to ask for you for me, but he only said, 'We are too poor. It is no use. We have only one horse and two cows. Ignacio has several horses and thirty cows.' As if that was a reason, when I want you so much!" he added indignantly. "If I had the whole world I would give it to Salvador, and he might be cacique of it all, if he would only let me have you." He drew himself up to the wall again and kissed the little warm hand eagerly. "My sweetheart!" he exclaimed, "I shall die if I do not get you! Oh, if I could only tear down this hateful wall! How can I talk to you properly when I cannot see you? May not I get in by the terrace roof? Let me try."

"Hush, Felipe," she said. "Don't be foolish, you silly boy. You would be sure to be heard, and then everything will be ruined. You must be patient." Here she gave his hand a little squeeze, which of course had just the contrary effect to her advice, for he kissed the fingers with redoubled ardour. Then he broke in—

"But if I can't get in without disturbing them, how will you be able to get out?"

"Oh, I can manage that," said the girl. "I will slip into this storeroom when they are asleep, as I always do, and from here I can get through the trap-door into the room above, and so out on to the terrace. There is an old ladder I can get up by."

The villages of the Pueblo Indians are built in terraces, each house-storey standing back from the one below it like a flight of gigantic steps. From terrace to terrace people ascend by ladders, and many of the lower rooms are without any door but a trap-door in

the ceiling. The system is a relic of the times when their villages were castles for defence against their deadly enemies, the marauding Navajos and Apaches.

"How brave you are, Josefito *mia*!" he cried. "Will you really dare to run away from them, and come with me? How sweet it will be! we shall be together for the first time—think of it! Oh, I will make you happy, I will indeed!"

"If they rob me of you, I shall die," said the girl in a low, sad voice. "One thing, Felipe, I promise you, I will not be Ignacio's wife. Never! You need not fear that."

"Oh, my darling," he sighed, "how can I be content with that? I want you for my very own. In my eyes you are more beautiful than the saints in the church, and they are not more wise and good than you. Why are things made so hard for us?"

"I do not know," she said softly; "nobody seems to be so unhappy as we are. But we can comfort each other ever so much. My step-mother will make me work like a slave all to-morrow, I know, but I shall have the thought of you to comfort me."

"My sweetheart!" said he. "You have a thousand times more to bear than I have. But I will try to think for you. You must take some rest. I know how they treat you." He ground his teeth. "We must part now, but I will come to-morrow night. I will bring a horse if I can get one. If not, we have one day left still, and we will settle what to do."

"Till to-morrow night, then," said she.

"To-morrow night at moonset," said Felipe; and with many final pressures of hands, each one intended to be the very last, the lovers parted.

Silently the moccasined feet of the boy stole up the

wide street, as he ran homeward under the clear starlight. He lifted the latch of his mother's door and entered. The fire was low, and he put on another stick of cedar wood, and lying down on the sheepskins spread upon the floor, covered himself with his blanket and lay still. His father, old Atanacio, woke up when he came in, but said nothing to him; and soon sleep reigned again supreme in the Indian house. The Indians are early risers as well as light sleepers, and before daylight they were up and stirring. After their breakfast of bread and dried mutton, Atanacio said, "When you have taken care of the horses of the Americano, Felipe, you had better weed the wheat patch by the meadow. Tomas and I are going to the patch up by the orchard."

"I want," said Felipe, somewhat timidly, "to go to the herd and get the horse."

"Bad luck take the boy!" snarled the old Indian. "What does he want with the horse? Does he think we keep a horse for him to wear him to a skeleton flying round the country on him? Let him be. Let him get fat on the green grass."

"But I shall want him if I go with Sooshuamo," answered Felipe diplomatically. "The Americano told me that he was going off to the sierra for a hunt to get meat as soon as he had made the rocks jump out of the acequia for us as he has promised. He said when he went on a hunt he wanted me to go along and help him to pack the meat down. His rifle never misses, and then when he kills a wild bull he will give me meat—fresh meat—father."

"Bad luck take the Americano, too," growled the old man, as crossly as ever. "Whose cattle are they that he wants to kill? The wild cattle in the mount-

ain are the children of ours, though they have no brands. Why should he come and kill them?"

"The cacique gave him leave, father."

"Well, I suppose he says so," was the ungracious response. "But if he wants to take you, he can give you a beast to ride. He has two mules besides the mare, and they do nothing, and eat maize all the time. They ought to be fat."

"But if he kills a bull he will want them to carry the meat," said Felipe. "One mule can't carry it all."

"Very well, then, you can ride one of his up and walk back," snapped the stern parent. "Want to ride the horse indeed! Lazy young rascal! Go afoot."

Felipe felt rebellious. He was getting to be a man now, and his father still wanted to treat him with as little consideration as a child. Instead of showing increasing respect to his tall son, the old man grew crosser and crosser every day. But Felipe had never rebelled against the parental yoke, though he had said to himself a hundred times that he would not stand it any longer. Yet in plotting to elope with Josefa he was plotting a rebellion far more venturesome against the code of the community of which he was a member.

"There is n't much hope there," said he to himself as he left the house, "but I knew that before. Now for Don Estevan." It was no use to try to borrow from any of the other Indians, for every man of them had his horse out at the herd—except, indeed, the cacique himself—and the herd was a day's journey away. With an anxious heart the boy wended his way to the next street of the village, which was the one where the American lodged.

CHAPTER II

A LONE HAND

THE sun was just rising above the mesas, or flat-topped hills that formed the eastern horizon of the view from the village, as Felipe knocked at the door in the row of mud-built houses. His knock was answered by a fierce growl from a dog, and a loud "Come in" in Spanish from a vigorous human voice. He opened the door, which was unlocked, and stepped cautiously inside. From the brown blankets of a bed that stood by the wall a brindled bulldog was emerging, and apparently proposed to drive the intruder out.

"Dry up, Faro, will you?" said the same voice in English, addressing the dog. "Can't you see it's only Felipe?"

The dog, who evidently had a general theory that all Indians would bear watching, lay down again sulkily on the bed, and Felipe advanced to the fireplace. The owner of the voice was seated on a low stool, bending over the coals, with his back to the door.

"Good-morning, Don Estevan; how are you?" said Felipe in Spanish. The Santiago people spoke an Indian dialect of their own amongst themselves, but they used Spanish as a medium of communication with the rest of the world.

Stephens, for that was the American's name, which in its Spanish form had become Don Estevan, was busy cooking, and he answered without looking round, "Good-morning, Felipe; how goes it?" A critic might have said that his Spanish accent was by no means perfect, but no more was the Indian's, and the pair were able to understand one another readily enough, which was the main point.

How had this American come to be living here by himself in a remote village community of the Pueblo Indians? During ten long years of search for gold he had wandered from Colorado to California, from California to Nevada, from Nevada to Montana, and from Montana back again to Colorado. The silver boom in Colorado had just begun, and then silver mines were all the talk there. Thereupon Stephens recollected a story he had heard from an old prospector with whom he had once been camped in Nevada about a deserted silver mine in New Mexico which had once been worked by the Spaniards, with the forced labour of their Indian slaves, and had since lain idle, untouched, and even unknown. When the Spanish power was broken, and the Spaniards driven out, the Indians had covered up the place and sworn never to disclose its existence. According to the story, the sole possessors of the secret were the Pueblo Indians of Santiago.

To Santiago accordingly Stephens had made his way in the hope of solving the mystery of the secret mine. This hope, however, was one which he could not avow openly at the first meeting, and when he presented himself before the chiefs of the pueblo it was of gold and not of silver that he spoke. He told them of his past toils and adventures, and the red men seemed to take a fancy to him on the spot. Hitherto these In-

dians had persistently enforced their right to prevent any man not of their own blood from taking up his abode within a league of their village of Santiago, a right secured to them by special grant from the kings of Old Spain. What was there about this man that melted their obduracy? Some charm they must have found in the face of this lone wanderer, for him alone among white men had they admitted as a permanent guest to the hospitality of their most jealously guarded sanctuary.

Perhaps there was something of pure caprice in their choice; perhaps it was in a way due to the effect of physical contrast. For in this case the contrast between the white man and the red, always marked, was as striking as it could possibly be. He was as fair as they were dark. With his white skin, his grey-blue eyes, and his curling golden hair, worn long in frontier fashion, he was as fair as any Norseman that ever boasted his descent from the ancient Vikings.

"Gold," said Tostado, one of the chiefs, as Stephens sat in the midst of them on the occasion of his first visit; "we ask you what sort of a life you live, and you answer us that you live only to search for gold. Why, here is the gold. You carry it with you"; and with a reverent grace the fine old chief laid his dark fingers gently on the long yellow locks that flowed down from under the prospector's wide sombrero.

The grey-blue eyes of the far-wandered man—one who like Ulysses of old had withstood the buffets of capricious Fortune through many adventurous years—found an expression of genuine friendliness in the dark orbs of this redskin chief, who smiled gravely at his own jest, as if in half-excuse of its familiarity. Tostado

gazed into the white man's eyes a moment longer, and then turned to the circle of his fellow-chiefs.

"See," he said, "the white man's eyes are the same colour as our precious turquoise stones; they are the colour of our sacred jewel, the Shiuamo, that I wear as the head man of the Turquoise family," and he pointed to his breast where a large polished turquoise hung from a circlet round his neck. "The white man has travelled far; he is weary; he shall stay with us and rest a while; and we will give him an Indian name, and he shall be as one of ourselves. Let him be called 'Sooshuamo,' 'Turquoise-eyes.' My brothers, say, is it good?"

"Yes, it is good," they answered, "it is good. From henceforth Sooshuamo is one of us; he is our brother."

And in this fashion the roving gold-seeker had obtained amongst them the acceptance he desired.

Felipe, with his striped blanket gracefully draped round him, came and stood just behind his employer, but said nothing. On a rough table were a tin cup and tin plate and an iron-handled knife; a small coffee-pot was bubbling in the ashes on the hearth. Stephens held a frying-pan in his left hand, and beside him on a tent-cloth on the floor lay a large smooth boulder and a hammer, with which he had been pounding his tough dried meat before cooking it. He now stood up to his full height, and turning his face, flushed with the fire, to Felipe, pointed with the steel fork held in his right hand to a great wooden chest against the wall at one side of the room. "Go and take an almud of corn and give it to the stock," said he. "Give Morgana her extra allowance."

"Yes, señor," said Felipe; and taking down three

nosebags which hung on a peg in the wall, he filled them, and went out to the corral in the outskirts of the village where the American kept his beasts. The mare Morgana was a beautiful bay, of pure Morgan stock, and the mules were sturdy little pack animals of Mexican breed. By the time they had eaten their corn, and the boy had returned to the house with the nosebags, his employer had finished his meal and was washing up the dishes. Felipe hung up the nosebags, and stood by the fire silent and thoughtful ; it never occurred to him to offer to help in what he looked upon as women's work. Stephens took the wiping cloth and began to wipe up. Felipe at last screwed up his courage to ask for the mare he needed so badly.

" Oh, Don Estevan ! " he began suddenly.

" Well, what is it ? " said Stephens sharply, rubbing away at his tin plate. It always irritated him to see anyone else idle when he was busy. Felipe's heart sank. He felt he should fail if he asked now. Perhaps his master would be in a better humour later on.

" What shall I do with the beasts ? " he said in his ordinary voice.

" Was that all you were going to say ? " said Stephens, looking at him keenly. " What 's the matter with you ? What 's up ? "

" Nothing, Don Estevan—it 's nothing," said Felipe. " Shall I put them into the meadow as usual ? "

" Yes, certainly," replied Stephens. " I sha' n't ride. I shall walk up the acequia to the rock I am going to blast. If I want them after, I 'll come down."

" Very well, señor," said the boy ; and taking the lariats he went back to the corral, caught the stock, and led them down the Indian road, through the unfenced fields of springing crops, towards the river.

At the lower end of the plough-lands a steep bank of bare earth and clay dropped sharply to the green flat fifteen or twenty feet below, through which the river ran. The plough-lands lay on a sort of natural terrace, and were all watered by numerous channels and runlets, which had their sources in the great *acequia madre*, or main ditch. This ditch was taken out of the river some miles above, where it was dammed for the purpose, and was led along the side of the valley as high up as possible ; the pueblo was built beside the ditch more than a league below the dam, nearly half a mile from the river in a direct line. The grassy flat through which the river flowed remained unploughed, because it was liable to be overflowed in flood time. It was a verdant meadow, the common pasture-ground of the milch cows of the village, which were herded here during the day by small boys and at night were shut up in the corrals to keep them out of the unfenced crops. Felipe hobbled the three animals in the meadow, and set to work weeding in the wheat land above, where he could keep an eye upon them.

Some time after Felipe's departure, Stephens went to his powder-keg and measured out three charges of blasting-powder.

"Curious, is n't it?" said he aloud to himself as he handled the coarse black grains in which so much potential energy lay hid,—“curious how these Indians, hard-working folk as ever I saw, have lived two or three hundred years here under the Spanish Government, and been allowed by those old Dons to go on, year after year, short of water for irrigating, every time.”

He closed up his powder-keg again securely, and locked it away in the room that he used as a storeroom ;

it was the inner of the two rooms that he rented in the block of dwellings inhabited by the Turquoise family. Here he lived, alone and independent, simply paying Felipe a trifle to do his chores and go up to the mesas and get his fire-wood. Indoors the prospector distinctly preferred to keep himself free and un beholden to anybody ; he continued to live exactly as he did in camp, doing his own cooking and mending, and doing them thoroughly well too, with a pioneer's pride in being sufficient to himself in all things.

" And now," said he, as he wrapped up the charges of powder, " I 'll just show my good friends of Santiago here a little trick those old Spanish drones were too thick-headed or too lazy ever to work. This fossilised Territory of New Mexico don't rightly know what 's the matter with her. She 's got the best climate and some of the best land in America, and all she 's good for at present is to bask in the sun. If she only knew it, she 's waiting for a few live American men to come along and wake her up."

Stephens had been so much alone in the mountains that he had got into the solitary man's trick of talking to himself. Even among the Indians he would sometimes comment aloud upon things in English, which they did not understand ; for in spite of their companionship he lived in a world of his own.

He took down a coil of fuse from a shelf, cut off a piece, rolled it up, and stowed it away along with the charges of blasting-powder in his pockets, first feeling carefully for stray matches inside. " Yes," he continued, as his fingers pried into every angle of each pocket preparatory to filling it with explosive matter, " drones is the only name for Spaniards when it comes to talking real work. They don't work, and they

never did. They've made this Territory into a Sleepy Hollow. What she wants is a few genuine Western men, full of vim, vinegar, and vitriol, just to make things hum for a change. New Mexico has got the biggest kind of a future before her when the right sort of men come along and turn to at developing her."

He stood in the middle of his outer room, patting himself gently in various parts to make sure that he had got all his needful belongings stowed away. "Now then, Faro," and he addressed the dog, who was still curled upon the bed eyeing his master doubtfully, uncertain whether he was to be left at home on guard or taken out for a spree; "what this here benighted country needs is the right kind of men and the right kind of dogs. Aint that the sort of way you'd put it if you were a human? Come along then, and you and me'll take a little trot up along the ditch and astonish their weak minds for 'em."

With yelps of joy, uttered in a bulldog's strangled whistle, Faro bounded off the bed on to the earthen floor, and danced rapturously round his master, who was still thoughtfully feeling his pockets from the outside to make certain that when he reached his destination he would not find that some quite indispensable requisite had been left behind. Then he bounced out of the open door into the street, scattered a pig and three scraggy chickens that were vainly hunting around after stray grains of corn where the horses had been fed, and then halted to await his master out by the corrals. Stephens, having at last assured himself that he had really forgotten nothing, came out after the dog, pulling to the door behind him, and the pair started off to walk up alongside the acequia. There was no water in it to-day, as it had

been cut off up above to facilitate the work of blasting. Here and there in the fields Indians were at work : some wielded their great heavy hoes, with which they hacked away at the ground with astonishing vigour ; others were ploughing with pairs of oxen, which walked stiffly side by side, their heads lashed firmly by the thick horns to the yoke, as they dragged the curious old-fashioned wooden ploughs, just like those described by Virgil in the *Georgics* two thousand years ago. In the peach orchards near the village women were at work, and little naked brown children stopped their play to stare at the white man as he passed, with the simplicity of Arcadia. After half an hour's walk he reached his destination, a rocky promontory that jutted out from the hills into the valley. The acequia ran round its base, and the Indians, in order to bring as much of the valley as possible under irrigation, had carried the line of the ditch as high as they could. They had carried it so high that where it rounded the rocks a point projected into it, and made it too narrow and too shallow to carry the amount of water that it was easily capable of containing both above and below. They had no saws to cut boards to make a flume for the ditch ; and, besides, such a piece of engineering was quite beyond the range of their simple arts. This weak place had been a hindrance and a trial to them from time immemorial. If they attempted to run their ditch more than half full of water it brimmed over at this point, and then broke down the bank. It had to be patched every year,—sometimes several times in one year,—and this entailed much extra work on the members of the village community, who were all bound by their laws to work on the ditch when necessary, without pay. In fact, the repair of the ditch at the point of

rocks was one of the stock grievances of the pueblo, everyone thinking that he was set to do more than his share of the work. Besides, it naturally broke down when fullest, that is to say, when they needed it most for irrigation, and everyone wanted water for his maize or his wheat crop. No wonder, then, they were first incredulous and then overjoyed when by a fortunate chance Stephens happened to hear of their difficulty and went to examine the spot, saw at once that it was a simple matter, and offered to lend them tools, to show them how to drill the necessary holes, and then to blast away the obnoxious rocks for them. These Indians were familiar with firearms and knew the force of gunpowder, but were ignorant of its use for blasting purposes ; nor were their Mexican neighbours in this part of the country much more enlightened. Accordingly they had accepted with joy Stephens's proffered assistance, having learned by experience to set a high value on the skill and resource of their American friend.

CHAPTER III

BLASTING THE ACEQUIA

A LITTLE crowd of these peaceful and industrious red men, in character so unlike their wild cousins of the prairie and the sierra, were grouped around the point of rocks. As Stephens approached them he heard the click, click, of steel on stone ; and as he came near the crowd made way for him, and the cacique saluted him : " Good morning, Sooshiuamo; you have come at the right time. See how well the young men have worked at making the holes in the rock as you showed them yesterday. They have made them quite deep now. Come and tell us if they are right."

Stephens looked into the ditch, where a powerfully built Indian was laboriously jumping a heavy bar of steel up and down in a hole bored in the hard, solid rock, giving it a half-turn with his wrists at each jump. The Colorado miner got down into the ditch and took the drill he had lent them out of the hands of the Indian, and tried the hole with it. His deft and easy way of handling the heavy jumping-bar showed practised skill as well as strength. " That 'll do right enough," he said, looking up at the cacique who stood on the bank above him. " You have got your chaps to do the business well. Are the other two holes as deep as this ? "

"Yes, deeper," answered the Indian. "See, here they are; try them; the young men have been at them since noon yesterday."

Stephens moved along to the points indicated and examined in a critical manner the work that had been effected. "Yes, that looks as if it would do all right," he said in approving tones. "Now then, you fellows, give me room, and keep still a few minutes, and I'll show you some fireworks."

He produced from his pockets the powder and fuse, and proceeded to make his, to them, mysterious preparations, the eager and inquisitive circle of red men pressing as near as possible, and almost climbing over each other's shoulders in order to get a good view. Their excited comments amused Stephens greatly, and in return he kept up a running fire of jests upon them.

But it is not always easy to jest appropriately with men who stand on a different step of the intellectual ladder from yourself; and without his dreaming of such a thing, one of his laughing repartees suggested to his Indian auditors a train of thought that their minds took very seriously.

Stephens's action in ramming down a charge of powder, and then tamping it, had not unnaturally reminded them of an operation which was the only one connected with gunpowder that they had experience of. "Why, he's loading it just like a gun," cried a voice from the crowd; "but what's he going to shoot?"

"Shoot?" retorted Stephens, without looking up, as he adjusted the fuse with his fingers; "why, I'm going to shoot the sky, of course. Don't you see how this hole points right straight up to heaven? You sit on the mouth of it when I touch her off, and it'll boost

you aloft away up over the old sun there" ; and raising his face he pointed to the brightly glowing orb which was already high overhead.

At his words a sort of shiver ran around the ring of red men. Religion is the strongest and the deepest sentiment of the Indian mind, and the rash phrase sounded as if some violation of the sanctity of what they worshipped was intended. What ! Shoot against the sacred sky ! Shoot with sacrilegious gunpowder against the home of The Shiuana, of " Those Above " ? The deed might be taken as a defiance of those Dread Powers, and bring down their wrath upon them all.

Then came a crisis.

" Bad medicine ! witchcraft !" exclaimed a voice with the unmistakable ring of angry terror in it. To the Indian, witchcraft is the one unpardonable sin, only to be atoned for by a death of lingering torture.

A murmur of swift-rising wrath followed the accusing voice. The American was warned in a moment that he had made a dangerous slip, and he at once tried to get out of it with as little fuss as might be.

" You dry up !" he retorted indignantly. " Witchcraft be blowed ! You ought to know better than to talk like that, you folks. I 'm telling you truth now. That was only a little joke of mine, about shooting the sky. There 's no bad medicine in that. We Americans don't know anything about such fool tricks as witchcraft. Here 's all there is to it. I 'm simply going to blast this rock for you. It 's just an ordinary thing that 's done thousands of times every day in the mines all over the United States."

" Ah, but there are great wizards among the Americans, and their medicine is very bad," cried the same

voice of angry terror that had spoken before. "Are you working their works? are you one of them?"

Stephens glanced quickly round the ring of dark eyes now fixed on him with alien looks. He saw there a universal scowl that sent a chill through him.

"There's a lot of explosive stuff round here besides my blasting-powder," he said to himself, "and it looks as if I'd come mighty nigh touching it off, without meaning it, with that feeble little joke. What a flare-up about nothing!"

There flashed across his mind on the instant a story of three stranger Indians, who by some unlucky chance had violated the mysteries of the Santiago folk and had never been heard of more.

For himself he had every reason, so far, to be satisfied with his treatment, but now, at last, he had happened to touch on a sensitive spot with the Indians, and behold, this was the result. He saw that he must take a firm stand, and take it at once. He straightened himself up from his stooping position, dusting off the earth that adhered to his hands.

"Now, look here, you chaps," he said peremptorily, as he stood erect in the middle of the ditch, "you want to quit that rot about witches right here and now. There's only one question I'm going to ask you, and that's this—do you want your ditch fixed up, or don't you? You say it has been a trouble to you for hundreds of years, and here I stand ready to fix it for you right now in just one minute. There's only one more thing to be done, and that's to strike the match. Come, Cacique, you're the boss around here. Say which it is to be. Is it 'yes' or 'no'?"

Salvador, the cacique of Santiago, was no fool. Personally he was as firm a believer in witchcraft as

any of his people, nor would he have hesitated for a moment to utilise such a charge as had just been made to rid himself of an enemy. But he was also well aware that there were times when it was far more expedient to suppress it, and that this was one of them.

"Nonsense, Miguel!" he exclaimed, turning abruptly on the Indian who had first raised the dreaded cry; "this Americano is a good man, and no wizard, and your business is to hold your tongue till you are asked to speak. It is the proper office of your betters to see to these matters, and you have no right nor call to interfere."

The lonely American heard him speak thus with an intense sense of relief. The power of the chief was great, and his words were strong to exorcise the malignant spirit of fanaticism.

"Good for you, Salvador!" he exclaimed, as the cacique's reproof ceased, and left a visible effect on the attitude of the crowd, "that's the talk! I'm glad to see you've got some sense. Your answer is 'yes,' I take it."

"Assuredly I mean 'yes,' Sooshiuamo," answered the cacique; "we want you to go on and finish your work. I say so, and what I say I mean. But if all is ready, as you declare, before you strike the match we will offer a prayer to Those Above that all may be well."

"Why certainly, Cacique," assented Stephens, "I've got no sort of objection to make. You fire ahead." He breathed more freely now, but he was conscious of a vastly quickened interest in the religious methods of the Indians as he watched the cacique withdraw a little space from the edge of the ditch and turn, facing the *east, the other* Indians following his example, and

standing in irregular open formation behind him, all facing towards the east likewise.

"Did n't reckon I was going to drop in for a prayer-meeting," said the American, with a humour which he kept to himself, "or I might have brought my Sunday-go-to-meeting togs if I'd only known. But, by George! when I was mining over on the Pacific slope, the days when things was booming over there, if we'd had to stop and have prayers on the Comstock lode every time we were going to let off a blast, I should rather say that the output of bullion in Nevada would have fallen off some."

He listened intently to the flow of words that the cacique, acting as the spokesman of his people, was pouring forth, but they were utterly unintelligible to him, for the prayer was couched in the language of the tribe, and not in civilised Spanish. All he could distinguish were the "Ho-a's" that came in at intervals from the crowd like responses.

"I wonder what he's saying, and who or what he's saying it to?" he meditated questioningly. "What was it that Nepomuceno Sanchez was telling me only last week,—that they did n't have service in that old Roman Catholic church of theirs more than once in a blue moon, and all the rest of the time they go in for some heathen games of their own in their secret estufas in the pueblo; he swore that one time he dropped on to a party of them at some very queer games indeed, on the site of an old ruined pueblo of theirs' way off up on the Potrero de las Vacas—swore they had a pair of big stone panthers up there, carved out of the living rock, that they go and offer sacrifices to. I did n't more than half believe him then, but this makes me think there's something in it. What the blazes are

they at now?" A chorus of "Ho-a's," uttered with a deep, heartfelt intonation, like the long a-a-mens at a revival meeting, rose from the crowd. There rose also from them little tufts of feather-down that floated upwards to the sky, soaring as it were on the breath of the worshippers, outward and visible symbols of the petitions that ascended from the congregation. The cacique took a step in advance, holding in his hands two long feathers crossed; he stooped down and began to bury them in the loose, light soil. Stephens, his curiosity now intensely aroused, was moving forward a little in order to see more closely what was taking place, but an Indian instantly motioned him back in silence, finger on lip, with a countenance of shocked gravity, making the irreverent inquirer feel like an impudent small boy caught in the act of disturbing a church service.

"Perhaps at this stage of the performances they'd like to have me take off my hat," he soliloquised. "Well, mebbe I will." He looked round at the motionless figures reverently standing with bowed heads. "Do at Rome as Rome does, so some folks say. These Indians themselves don't have any hats to take off, but they look so blamed serious over it that I'm dead sure they would if they wore 'em. Dashed if I don't do it; here goes!" and he swept his broad sombrero from his head, subduing his face to a decorously grave expression.

But the repressed humour of the American reasserted itself beneath this enforced solemnity of his exterior. "Makes me think of the story of the man the Indians in California once took prisoner, only instead of putting him to the torture they painted him pea-green and *worshipped him* as a deity. It's not so bad as that

yet," he went on to himself, "but I don't much like taking any sort of part in this show, nohow." He looked at the hat which he was devoutly holding in his hand as he stood amongst the congregation, and his face assumed a quizzical expression. "I wonder now if by doing this I aint, by chance, worshipping some blamed idol or other. I used to be a joined member oncet, back there in Ohio, of the United Presbyterian Church. I wonder what poor old Elder Edkins would say now if he caught sight of me in this shivaree. However, I guess I can stand it, if it don't go too far. So long as they stick to this tomfoolery and only worship those turkey feathers, or whatever they are, that the cacique 's been burying, I' ll lay low. But if they want to play me for an idol, and start in to painting me pea-green, there 'll be a rumpus. What a time their prayer-meeting does take, anyhow ! Ah, thank goodness, here 's the doxology."

The cacique had finished his incantation over the crossed feathers, and interred them properly. He now rose and dismissed the assembly, which instantly broke up, the serious expression rapidly dissolving from all faces, as it does from those of a congregation pouring out of church.

It was on the tip of Stephens's tongue to begin, "Why, Cacique, you 've forgot to take up the collection. Where 's your plate ?" as he saw Salvador approaching him, but a sobering recollection of the awkward way in which his last joke had missed fire checked the temptation to be flippant as too dangerous.

"My game," thought he, "is to cut the gab and come to the 'osses, as the English circus-manager said ; or else they *might* call on Brother Miguel to give an

exhortation, and who knows which end of the horn I should be liable to come out at then ? ”

“ Well, Cacique,” he said aloud, “ through ? so soon ? You don’t say ! Are you really ready now ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the Indian, “ now you begin. Do your work.”

“ All right then,” rejoined the American ; “ if that’s so, by the permission of the chairman I ’ll take the floor.” He sprang down into the ditch, drew out a match, and turned round to the cacique. “ Now, Salvador,” he called out, “ make your people stand clear. Let them go right away.”

They did not need telling twice, and there was a general stampede, the bolder hiding close by, the most part running off to the distance of a rifle-shot. The cacique gathered up the buckskin riata of his plump mustang, which stood there champing the Spanish ring-bit till his jaws dropped flakes of foam, and retired to a safe distance. Stephens stood alone in the ditch and struck the match. It went out ; he took off his broad felt hat, struck another match, and held it inside. This time the flame caught, and he applied it to the ends of the fuses, and retreated in a leisurely manner round the back of a big rock near by. He found two or three of the boldest Indians behind it, and pushing them back stood leaning against the rock. They squeezed up against him, their bright black eyes gleaming and their red fingers trembling with excitement. They had never seen a blast let off before.

Boom ! boom ! went the first two charges, and the echoes of the reports resounded through the foothills that bordered the valley. Several Indians started forward from their hiding-places.

“ *Keep back there, will you !* ” shouted Stephens.

"Keep 'em back, Salvador. Tito," he said familiarly to the Indian who was next him beside the rock, "if you go squeezing me like that I'll pull your pigtail." Tito's long black hair was done up and rolled with yellow braid into a neat pigtail at the nape of his neck. The Pueblo Indian men all wear their hair this way, and are as proud of their queues as so many Chinamen.

Tito laughed and showed his gleaming teeth, as he nudged the boy next to him at the American's joke. Boom! went the third charge. The practical miner looked up warily to see that no fragments were flying overhead, and then stepping from under cover waved his arm. At the signal the Indians poured from their hiding-places and rushed eagerly down to the scene of action.

The blast was a great success. Some tons of stone had been shattered and dislodged just where it was necessary, and it was plain to see that the ditch might now be made twice as big as before. Without any delay the Indians swarmed in like ants, and began picking up the broken stone with their hands, and carrying it out to build up and strengthen the lower side of the embankment.

While the workers were thus busily engaged, the cacique came forward, holding his horse by the riata of plaited buckskin. He made a deep, formal reverence before the man who had wrought what for them was nothing less than a miracle,—the man by whose superior art the solid rock had been dissipated into a shower of fragments, and who now stood quietly looking on at the scene of his triumph.

"It is truly most wonderful, this thing that you have done," began the chief, "and we will be your devoted servants for ever after this"; and he bowed himself

again more deeply than before, as deeply as when he had buried the sacred feathers a few minutes earlier.

The native humour of the American asserted itself at once. "Here 's the pea-green deity business on," he murmured to himself. "So far, so good ; I don't mind the deity part, but I draw the line if he trots out his paint-pot ; then I 'll begin to kick."

"Since the days of Montezuma," continued the cacique, with an eloquent wave of his hand, "no benefactor like you has ever come to the red men ; no blessing has been wrought for them such as you have done. Would that our departed ancestors had been allowed to see with their own eyes the great, the glorious manifestation of power that has been shown to us, their children —" and his mellifluous oratory rolled on in an unceasing stream of praise.

"By George!" said Stephens to himself, "I wonder if right now is n't my best time to bounce him about the silver mine. I did calculate to bring it up before the council of chiefs when I saw a favourable opportunity, but though the rest of 'em are n't here at this moment the cacique 's talking so almighty grateful that perhaps I 'd better strike while the iron 's hot." He listened a moment to the profuse expressions of gratitude that poured from the red man's lips. "If he only means a quarter of what he 's saying, I ought to have no difficulty in getting him to back me up. But perhaps I 'd best tackle him alone first, and make sure of his support." He waited until the cacique had finished his peroration.

"Glad you 're pleased, I 'm sure," said Stephens in reply, "and here 's my hand on it," and he shook the *cacique's* hand warmly in his. "Just let 's step this way

a little," he went on quietly. "I've got a word or two to say to you between ourselves," and the pair moved away side by side to a distance of a few yards from the site of the blasted rock.

"You see, working together like this, how easily we've been able to manage it," began the American diplomatically. "I'm an expert at mining, and your young men have carried out the execution of this job admirably. Now, look at here, Cacique; what I wanted to say to you was this. Why should n't we go in together, sort of partners like, and work your silver mine together in the same sort of way? I could make big money for both of us; there'd be plenty for me and plenty for you and for all your people, if it's only half as good as I've heard tell"; he paused, looking sideways at the Indian as he spoke to note what effect his suggestion produced on him. At the words "silver mine" the chief's face, which had been smiling and gracious in sympathy with the feelings he had been expressing in his speech, suddenly clouded over and hardened into a rigid impassibility.

"I don't know what you mean by our silver mine, Don Estevan," he answered frigidly. "There is no such thing in existence."

"Tut, tut," said Stephens, good-humouredly, "don't you go to make any mystery of the thing with me, Cacique. I'm your good friend, as you acknowledged yourself only a minute ago. I mean that old silver mine you've got up there on Rattlesnake Mountain, Cerro de las Viboras as you call it. You keep it carefully covered up, with logs and earth piled up over the mouth of it. Quite right of you, too. No use to go and let everybody see what you've got. I quite agree to that. But you need n't make any bones about it

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with me who am your friend, and well posted about the whole thing to boot."

In reality Stephens was retailing to the Indian the story of the mine as far as he had been able to trace it among the Mexicans. This was the first time that he had even hinted to any of the Santiago people that he knew anything at all about it, or had any curiosity on the subject. Salvador maintained his attitude of impassibility.

"I don't know who has told you all this," he answered, "but it is all nonsense. Put it out of your mind; there's nothing in it."

But in spite of these denials Stephens believed his shot about the mine had gone home, and he knew also that the cacique was reputed to be fond of gain.

"Oh, I understand you well enough, Salvador," he rejoined with easy familiarity. "Of course you're bound to deny it. It's the old policy of your tribe. That's all right. But now, as between you and me, it's time there was a new departure, and you and I are the men to make it. I tell you I know just what I'm talking about, and there's money in it for both of us." He thought he saw the dark eyes of the Indian glisten, but his lips showed small sign of yielding.

"It's no use, Don Estevan," the latter said firmly. "I cannot tell you a word now, and I don't suppose I ever shall be able to. Keep silence. Let no one know you have spoken to me about such things."

At this moment loud cries broke out from where the workers were busy, and Stephens, wondering what was up, listened intently to the sounds. He thought he could distinguish one word, "Kaeahvala," repeated again and again. The cacique turned round abruptly. *A huge rattlesnake*, which had been disturbed by the

shock of the blast, had emerged from a crevice in the rocks, and showed itself plainly to view wriggling away over the open ground.

"After him, after him, Snakes!" called out the cacique in a loud voice. "He is angry because his house has been shaken. To the estufa without delay! You must pacify him."

On the instant there darted forth in pursuit half a dozen young men of the Snake family, and at the same moment Faro, with an eager yelp, announced his ardent intention of pacifying the snake in his own fashion, and away went the dog, who had been compelled to endure, much against his will, the tedium of the Indian prayer-meeting and the oratory of the cacique, and now proceeded to grow frantic with excitement at the chance of joining independently in the chase.

"Come back there, Faro," cried Stephens, in an agony of alarm for his favourite; "come back there, will you!" But Faro was headstrong and pretended not to hear.

The cacique too was filled with alarm, but the object of his solicitude was not the dog but the reptile. "Quick, quick!" he cried to the young men; "be quick and save him from that hound."

And then Stephens saw a sight that astonished him out of measure. The Indian youths had the advantage of Faro in starting nearer the snake; they ran like the wind, and the foremost of them, overtaking the reptile before Faro could get up, pounced upon him and swung him aloft in the air, grasping him firmly just behind the head and allowing the writhing coils to twine around his muscular arm. One of his companions produced a bunch of feathers and stroked the venomous

head from which the forked tongue was darting, while the baffled Faro danced around, leaping high in his efforts to get at his prey. Stephens ran up and secured his dog, and looked on at this extraordinary piece of snake-charming with an amazement that increased every moment.

"But why don't you kill the brute?" he cried. "Don't play with him like that; kill him quick. Tell 'em to kill him, Cacique. I never passed a rattler in my life without killing it if I could; it's a point of conscience with me."

The Indian looked at him with grave disapproval, as a parent might look at a child who had in its ignorance been guilty of a serious fault.

"You do not understand, Sooshiuamo," he said in a tone in which reproof was mingled with pity; "the snake is their grandfather, and they have to show their piety towards him." Then turning from the scoffer, "Hasten," he called to the young men; "run with him to the proper place"; and away they sped across the plain towards the pueblo, the writhing reptile still borne high in the air, and the bunch of feathers still playing around its angry jaws.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Stephens. "I never saw such a thing as that in my life. I say, Cacique, what is it that you want to do with the brute, anyhow? Do you mean to tell me that you make a deity of him?"

The cacique's face assumed the same rapt and solemn expression it had worn during what Stephens had irreverently called the prayer-meeting.

"These are our mysteries, Sooshiuamo," he said with a voice of awe; "it is not for you to inquire into them. Be warned, for it is dangerous."

“ Oh, blow your mysteries ! ” said Stephens in English, under his breath. “ Very well, Salvador,” he went on aloud. “ I ’m sure I don’t want to go poking my nose into other people’s business. I think I ’ll just say good-morning. I ’ve blasted that rock for you all right. Now you see if you can make that ditch work ; if you can’t, you come and tell me, and I ’ll see what more I can do to fix it for you. So long ” ; and without more ado he turned on his heel and walked off down to the river.

CHAPTER IV

A RACE WITH A MULE

WHEN Stephens arrived at the edge of the terrace on which the plough-lands lay, he looked down on the green expanse of meadow through which the river ran, and feeding in it half a mile below he saw some stock that he knew must be his. "There they are," said he to himself. "I reckon I'll take Jinks and go down to San Remo and get my mail, and see if those Winchester cartridges that I sent for from Santa Fé came last night."

He clambered down the abrupt bank of red clay to the meadow, and followed down the line of the stream till he came to where his stock were eagerly cropping the fresh green grass.

"Now how am I going to catch him?" said he to himself. "Let's see where Felipe and the lariats are"; and looking round, he presently perceived some clothes on the river bank, and going to them found Felipe, stripped to his waist-cloth, splashing about in the middle of a deep pool.

"Hullo, Felipe!" cried he playfully. "Trying to drown yourself there? You must go to the Rio Grande for that—there is n't water enough in the Santiago River."

Felipe heard him indistinctly, and came towards him,

swimming in Indian style with an amazingly vigorous overhand stroke. Stephens picked up one of the lariats that were lying loose on the ground by the clothes, and swinging the noose round his head, jestingly tried to lasso the lad. Missing him, he turned it off with, "I don't want you yet. I want the big mule; I'm going to catch him and go down to San Remo"; and suiting the action to the word, he coiled the lariat as he spoke, and turned and started for the beasts.

Felipe came out and stood on the bank to watch him. "What a good humour he's in now," thought the boy. "I suppose he was lucky with the rock. Now is my time to ask him for the mare."

Stephens, holding the coil of rope behind him to conceal his intention from the mule he desired to catch, cautiously approached him. Jinks, the mule, however, was not to be deceived for a moment, and as his master came near, turned his heels to him and scuttled off. Horses and mules where they have frequently to wear hobbles become surprisingly active in them. They bound along for a short distance, in an up-and-down rocking-horse gallop, so fast that even a man on horseback has to make his mount put his best foot forward to get up to them. Stephens found himself outpaced, and gave it up, seeing that it was impossible for him to capture the truant single-handed.

Felipe flew to his side in a moment. "Let me try to catch him, Sooshiuamo," cried he, eagerly. "Let me!" and taking the lariat from the not unwilling hands of the American, he started off, coiling it rapidly as he ran. Before bathing he had undone his pigtail, and his long, glossy black hair hung in thick, wavy masses down to his waist. Among the Indians, the women cut their hair short—if it remained uncut the care

of it would take too long, and would keep them from their household duties ; but the men, having more leisure, allow theirs to grow, and are very proud of its luxuriance and beauty. As Felipe ran, his streaming locks floated out behind him on the air like the mane of a wild horse, and gave to his figure a wonderfully picturesque effect ; his wet skin shone in the sun the colour of red bronze.

The Pueblo Indians are fine runners ; they have inherited fleetness of foot and endurance from their forefathers, and keep up the standard by games and races among themselves. Felipe, young though he was, had no superior in swiftness in the village. He darted like a young stag across the meadow after the fugitive mule, and chased him at full speed down to the river brink, and over the dry shingle banks of its very bed. The pebbles rattled and flew back in showers from the hoof-prints of the mule. Round they wheeled, back into the meadow again ; and here the Indian, putting on an astonishing burst of speed, fairly ran the quadruped down, lassoed him, and brought him to his master.

"Here he is, señor," said he modestly, handing Stephens the rope.

"Well done, Felipe," said Stephens. "You did that well. You do run like an antelope." He felt quite a glow of admiration for the athletic youth who stood panting before him, resting his hand on the mule's back.

"Now 's my time," thought Felipe, "what luck!—oh, Don Estevan," he began, and then stopped with downcast eyes.

"Well, what is it ?" said Stephens kindly.

"Oh, Don Estevan, if you would lend me your

mare!" The murder was out, and Felipe looked up at his employer beseechingly. "I would take such care of her!" he continued; "I would indeed."

"Lend her for what?" said Stephens, a little taken aback. "What do you want with her?"

"I want her to go to Ensenada to-night," said the boy.

"Oh, but Felipe, I'm going to the sierra to-morrow to hunt, you know. It is n't possible. But," he continued, touched a little by the boy's evident distress, "what do you want to do there? Why don't you get your father's horse?"

"He's at the herd. My father does n't let me," said Felipe despondently. Then he went on, "I thought perhaps you did n't go for a day or two. I will bring her back to-morrow in the night. And she shall not be tired—not a bit. Oh, do lend her to me! Please do!"

"I wonder what foolery he's up to now," said Stephens to himself; "I do hate to lend a horse anyhow—and to a harebrained Indian boy who'll just ride all the fat off her in no time. Cheek, I call it, of him to ask it."

"But," he continued in a not unfriendly tone, "why do you want her? Is it flour you have to fetch?" Wheat flour was rather scarce this spring in the pueblo, and some of the Indians were buying it over on the Rio Grande.

"No, sir, it's not that. Only I want her," he added. "Oh please, Don Estevan, please," said he with an imploring face; "do lend the mare or the mule, or anything to ride. Oh do!" and he threw all the entreaty he was capable of into his voice, till it trembled and almost broke into a sob.

"Why, what ails the boy?" said Stephens, surprised at his emotion. "If you want it so bad," he continued, "why don't you ask it from Tostado, or Miguel, or some of them? They'll let you have one. You know I never lend mine. If I did once, all the pueblo would be borrowing them every day. You know it yourself. You've always told me yourself that it would be like that." He was trying to harden his heart by going over his stock argument against lending. "You see I can't do it. I'm going off to the sierra to-morrow," and he turned away, leading the mule after him by the rope.

But before he had gone far he stopped and looked round as if an idea had struck him. "It might be a good notion to try and pump this boy a bit right now," he considered; "he's so desperate eager to borrow the mare he might be willing to let out a thing or two to please me." He beckoned with his hand to Felipe, who was gazing regretfully after his employer.

"See here, Felipe," said Stephens, as the boy eagerly ran to him; "there's something that I had in my mind to ask you, only I forgot. It's just simply this—did you ever kill a rattlesnake?"

"Never, oh, never in my life!" cried the young Indian, with a voice of horror.

"Well, and why not?" persisted the other. "What's your reason anyway? What is there to prevent you?"

"Oh, but, Sooshiuamo, why should I?" said the boy in an embarrassed manner, looking distractedly at the ground as he balanced himself uneasily on one bare foot, crossing the other over it, and twiddling his toes together. "I don't know," he added after a *pause*. "Why should I kill them?"

"Well, they 're ugly, venomous things," said the American, "and that would be reason enough for anybody, I should think. But tell me another thing then. What do your folks do with them in the estufa? Can't you tell me that much?"

"What are you saying about things in the estufa?" cried the boy excitedly. "Have any of the Mexicans been telling you, then, that we keep a sacred snake in the pueblo? Don't you ever believe it, don't, don't!" and his voice rose to a passionate shrillness that betrayed the anxiety aroused in him by any intrusion on the mysteries of his people.

"The Mexicans be blown!" said Stephens. "I'm talking to you now of what I've just been seeing with my own eyes. There was a big old rattler came out of the rock after I blasted it, and young Antonio went and caught it by the neck and let it twist itself around his arm, and another fellow went to playing with it with a bunch of feathers, and then they ran off with it to the pueblo,—the cacique told them to,—and half a dozen more chaps with them, as tight as they could go. Now I want to know what all that amounts to."

"I can tell you this much," said Felipe after a moment's hesitation; "Antonio is one of the Snakes; so were the others, of course, who went with him. The snake is their grandfather, and so they know all about snakes. But I'm a Turquoise, like you, Sooshuamo. You are my uncle," he added insinuatingly, "and you should be kind to me and lend me a horse sometimes."

The American laughed aloud. "Oh, I know all about Grandfather Snake and Grandfather Turquoise and the rest of them," he said. "But I'm not an Indian, and I don't come into your family tree, even

if you do call me Sooshiuamo and I live in a Turquoise house. I don't lay claim to be any particular sort of uncle to you. But I do want you should tell me something more about this snake-charming business. Can't you let it out ? ”

“ But how can I let it out ? ” exclaimed Felipe in an irritated voice. “ Have n't I told you already that the Snakes know all about it, and not me ? You may be sure the Snakes keep their own affairs private, and don't show them to outsiders. How should I know anything about the Snakes' business ? ”

“ Well, Felipe, if you won't, you won't, I suppose,” said Stephens. “ I know you can be an obstinate young pig when you choose.” He did not more than half believe in the lad's professed ignorance. He hesitated a moment as if in doubt whether to try another tack. “ Look here, young 'un,” he began again in a friendlier tone, “ I 'll pass that. We 'll play it you don't know anything about snakes. You 're a full-blooded Turquoise boy, you are, and your business is to know all about turquoises, and turquoise mines, and so on. Very well.” He was pleased to see a sort of conscious smile come over the lad's mouth almost involuntarily. “ All right then. Let 's play it that you are my nephew if you like. Now then, fire ahead, you, and tell your uncle all about where we go to get our turquoises from. You 're bound to be posted up in these family matters. There 's a lot of things your uncle wants to hear. The silver plates for the horse bridles, for instance, now ; let 's hear where they come from. Go on ; tell me about our silver mines.”

“ No, no, no ! ” he cried desperately, and he sprang back as if the American had struck him with a whip. “ *It is impossible* ; there are n't any ; there are no such

things ; the Mexicans have been telling you that, too, have they ? but they 're all liars, yes, liars ; don't you ever believe one word that they say about us." He paused, his lips parted with excitement and his lithe frame passionately convulsed.

Regretfully Stephens looked at him and recognised that it was hopeless to get anything out of him, at least in his present condition. "Very well, Felipe," he said, "I think I understand your game. You just don't choose, and that 's about the size of it" ; and gathering up the coils of the lariat he turned abruptly away and led off the reluctant Captain Jinks in the direction of the pueblo in order to saddle him up. He felt decidedly cheap ; as yet he had not scored a single trick in the game he was trying to play.

Felipe stood looking after him disconsolately ; at last he gave a heavy sigh and walked back to where he had left his clothes, with drooping head and flagging step, a figure how unlike the elastic form that had burst full speed across the meadow five minutes before. "It 's no use," said he to himself. "He does n't care ; he 's a very hard man, is Don Estevan." He did up his glossy hair into its queue, put on his long buckskin leggings and his cotton shirt, worn outside in Indian fashion like a tunic and secured with a leather belt, bound his red handkerchief as a turban round his head—the universal pueblo head-dress—and with a very heavy heart went back to his weeding.

CHAPTER V

"OJOS AZULES NO MIRAN"

"*OJOS azules no miran*—Blue eyes don't see," said a soft voice to Stephens in gently rallying tones. He was sitting on Captain Jinks in the roadway, nearly opposite to the first house in San Remo, with his eyes shaded under his arched hands, and gazing fixedly back across the long levels of the Indian lands over which he had just ridden.

"*Si, miran*,—Yes, they do see," he answered coolly, without either looking at the speaker or removing his hands from his forehead, as he still continued his searching gaze. He was trying to make out whether the animals he had left in Felipe's charge were kept by him still grazing safely in the meadow, or if they had been allowed to wander off into the young wheat. The distance to where he had left them feeding was nearer two miles than one, but nature had gifted him with singularly keen vision, and the frontiersman's habit of being perpetually on the lookout had developed this power to the utmost. He was able to identify positively his own stock amongst the other animals at pasture, and to assure himself that, so far, they were all right.

He took his hands from his forehead, straightened *himself in his saddle*, and looked down at the person

who had ventured to speak in so disrespectful a way of the quality of his eyesight. The speaker was a young Mexican woman, and he encountered the glance of a pair of eyes as soft as velvet and as black as night, set in a face of rich olive tint. At that pleasant sight his firm features relaxed into a smile, and he took up her bantering challenge.

"*Si, miran,*" he repeated,—“Yes, they do see, señorita; they see a very pretty girl”; and with a ceremonious sweep of his arm he took off his broad sombrero, as the conventional way of emphasising the conventional gallantry.

The girl blushed with pleasure at the American's compliment. She had a dark scarf drawn over her head, and she now tossed the end of it coquettishly across her face, and kept up her bantering tone.

“Then,” replied she, “as you had them directed straight towards the Indian pueblo, I suppose it was a pretty little Indian squaw they were gazing back at so earnestly.”

“No,” he returned bluntly, matter-of-fact Anglo-Saxon that he was; “I was looking back towards Santiago in order to make out whether my horses had got into the Indians' wheat. But they 're all right. And how is your father, Don Nepomuceno?” he added civilly.

“He is very well, señor; he is now at home. Won't you come in and see him? He said he hoped you would be coming down this morning, as it was mail day.”

“I am much obliged to him,” answered Stephens. “I am on my way now to the stage station, and I will look in as I return.”

San Remo was the place where the weekly mail from

Santa Fé to Fort Wingate crossed the Santiago River. It was a village of the Mexicans, and lay just outside the boundary of the four square leagues of the Indian grant.

"That is where we two were going," she answered, "my little sister and myself," and she laid her hand on a little brown maiden of ten years or so, who had come out of the house and now stood shyly behind the elder sister, holding on to her dress. "We have to buy some sugar," she continued, "and there is a new storekeeper at the stage station, and they say he sells cheap."

"Then with your permission, señorita, I'll walk along there with you," said the American. He suited the action to the word, throwing his right leg lightly over the neck of his mule and then dropping both feet together to the ground so as to alight facing the girl.

"Say, Chiquita," and he addressed the younger girl, "don't you want a ride? Let me put you up"; but the child only smiled, showing her ivory teeth and clinging more closely behind her sister.

"Don't be a silly, Altagracia," cried the latter, bringing her round to the front. "Why don't you say 'thank you' to the American señor for his kindness in giving you a ride on his mule?" and she pushed her, in spite of her affected reluctance, into the hands of Stephens, who raised her from the ground and placed her, sitting sideways, in the wide California saddle, and gave her the reins to hold. Then, resting his right hand on the mule's neck, he walked forward towards the store beside the elder girl.

"I heard a new man had moved in and taken *charge of the stage station and post-office this week,*"

he said. “Has he got a good stock?—many pretty things for the señoras?”

“They say he has beautiful things,—velvet dresses and splendid shawls,” she replied; “but I have n’t seen them yet. I’ve only been in with my aunt to buy things for the house, not to see his dress goods. But I hope my father will take us there soon, before all the best of them are gone. The wife of Ramon Garcia got a lovely pink muslin there. She showed it to me yesterday in her house. He’s a very clever man, too, is the new storekeeper; he is a Texan, but he speaks Spanish beautifully, just like ourselves. He has a Mexican wife.”

“Ah,” remarked Stephens, “has he? What’s his name, do you know?”

“Bah-koose,” answered the girl, giving full value to the broad Spanish vowels which she imported into the somewhat commonplace name of “Backus.” “Don Tomas Bah-koose is his name,” she repeated. “He is not old, he appears to be about thirty, and he has three children. But perhaps you have met him; is he a friend of yours?”

“Backus,” said Stephens reflectively; “Thomas Backus. No, I can’t say that he is; I don’t remember ever meeting anyone of that name.”

“It sounds almost like our Spanish name, Baca,” said she; “but he is not one of the Bacas, though he has been living at Peña Blanca, where so many of them live.” The Bacas of New Mexico are a fine old family, sprung from the loins of Cabeza de Vaca, the comrade of Ponce de Leon, one of the heroes of the Spanish conquest.

“Well,” said Stephens, “we’ll soon see what he looks like, anyhow, for here we are at the store.” He

lifted the child down from the saddle, and the two girls at once went inside while he tied up his mule to a hitching-post that was set in front of the door.

After he had finished doing so, he followed them in ; and stepping across the threshold he was instantly aware of a surprised glance of half-recognition darted at him by a man who stood behind the counter, where he was showing some cotton prints to three shawl-clad Mexican women. " Mornin', mister," said the storekeeper, in English. " Excuse me if I keep you waitin' a minute while I 'tend on these ladies."

" All right," answered Stephens briefly, and he leaned quietly back against the mud-plastered adobe wall till the other should be at leisure. He ran his eye over the shelves, which, like those of most Mexican country village shops, contained a varied assortment that ranged from tenpenny nails to the tin saints whose shrines decorate even the poorest hovel in New Mexico. His gaze reverted to the storekeeper, who was a tall, dark, spare man, with a clean-shaven face, a bilious complexion, and snaky black hair. This, then, was Mr. Thomas Backus, an American citizen married to a Mexican wife. She had certainly helped him to a fluent command of her mother tongue, and Stephens could not help envying the easy way in which he poured out lavish praises of his new goods to the customers whom he was serving. The purchases of these ladies were presently completed, but they still remained in the store carrying on an animated conversation with Don Nepomuceno's daughter, who had joined them in discussing the patterns they had chosen.

" And now what can I do for you ? " inquired the storekeeper, looking Stephens in the face as he turned *to him*.

“Surely I have met this man before, but where?” said Stephens to himself, while he answered Mr. Backus’s question by remarking politely, “Oh, I’m not in any hurry, thank you. Won’t you serve this young lady first?” and with a slight gesture he indicated Manuelita, who was still absorbed in the muslins of her friends. Rack his memory as he would, he could not recall the occasion when he and Backus had met previously, yet he felt almost certain it had occurred.

“Why certainly, certainly,” returned the storekeeper cheerily; “so long as you don’t mind waitin’ a few minutes,” and he turned to the girl. “Then what may I have the pleasure of being allowed to show you, señorita?”

“Two peloncillos, Don Tomas, if you will be so kind,” answered the young lady; and two conical loaves of the brown Mexican sugar so popular in the Territory were accordingly wrapped in paper and handed over to her; but it was manifest that the pretty frocks were what were nearest to her heart, and she and her three friends still continued to discuss the subject with all the ardour of connoisseurs.

Meantime Stephens became more and more convinced in his own mind not only that this was not his first encounter with Backus, but that the latter was also engaged in watching him as closely as possible. He chose, however, not to call attention to this by any inquiry when at length the storekeeper announced himself ready to wait upon him, contenting himself with simply explaining the object of his visit to the store.

“I just wanted to see,” he said quietly, “if you happened to have a parcel here for me by the stage to-day from Santa Fé. Stephens is my name, John Stephens. It’s a parcel from Spiegelberg’s,” he added.

explanatorily, "that I 'm looking for ; a small, heavy parcel ; it 's Winchester cartridges."

" Oh yes, they 're here ; the stage driver left 'em for you all right," said Mr. Backus promptly, reaching down for them under the counter and handing them over. " And I think there 's some mail matter too for you ; I 'll just see " ; with which remark he disappeared into the little post-office that was boarded off at one end of the store, returning from there presently with some papers in his hand. " I reckon this letter 's for you " ; he read out the address with the laboured enunciation of a man of limited education. " To Mr. John Stephens, living among the Pueblo Indians, Santiago, N. M."

" Yes, that 'll be for me," said Stephens, putting out his hand for it.

" I reckoned as how you must be the man as soon as I seed you come in," answered Backus, handing over the letter along with a newspaper and a postal packet, "'cos by what I hear thar' aint no other American living in this valley."

" Just so," assented the prospector ; " I 'm the only one there is anywhere around here. I 've been playing a lone hand down in these parts all winter. For six months I have n't spoken to an American except the stage-driver."

It was a relief to him to talk English to anyone again after so long an interval, although he was not exactly prepossessed by Mr. Backus's looks, nor by the only thing he knew for certain about him, namely, that he had gone and married a Mexican wife, a decidedly eccentric thing for an American to do, in Stephens's eyes. But the mere sound of his native language again was music in his ears, even though it were spoken by a man as illiterate as the storekeeper. For, compared

to the other, Backus was illiterate. And it was a thing worth noting about Stephens, who had had the advantage of a high-school education, that though he now freely made use of the rude, vigorous colloquialism of the West,—so much so, indeed, that he talked to himself in it,—yet he could drop it in a moment on occasion. Before a stranger for whom he felt an instinctive distaste, he at once became formal, and his language took on a precision and his tone a punctiliousness that were foreign to his more familiar discourse. As he would have said of himself, “If I don’t cotton to a man at once, I always feel like putting on a lot of frills.”

“You bin long in these parts?” inquired Mr. Backus carelessly.

“About a year now in New Mexico,” replied Stephens; “but I’ve been in this Western country a good deal longer than that. I’m not a tenderfoot, exactly, if I may say so; I did n’t come to this country for my health.”

Many men whose lungs are affected have hoped to shake off their dread malady by breathing the pure, thin, dry air of Colorado and New Mexico. The hardy Western pioneer pities the consumptive patient; he succours him freely in distress; and, above all things, he hates to be mistaken for one himself. Stephens was determined that his fellow-countryman should be under no misapprehension on this point.

“No,” laughed Mr. Backus lightly, “nor you don’t look much like one of them pore health-seekers neither. Say, though,” he continued, more warily, “you’ll excuse my axin’, but was you never in New Mexico before this last year?”

“No,” replied Stephens—“that is—yes, I should

have said," correcting himself, "I was once, but only for a short time, and that was some years ago, and not in this part of the Territory." He shifted his position against the adobe wall a little, and laid down on the counter in a casual sort of way the parcel and the mail matter which he was holding, as if to indicate that he was ready for a long chat. In reality he was setting his hands free in case he might possibly need to use them. To be at all closely questioned about one's past life by an absolute stranger acts on the experienced Western man as a danger signal. He noted the intense glow in Backus's eyes, and as he did so he grew conscious of a strange sense of doubleness in his own brain, as if all this scene had been enacted once before, and he ought to know what was coming next. He shifted his waist-belt and left his thumbs resting lightly on the buckle in front ; it was a perfectly natural thing to do, and yet it left his right hand within six inches of the trusty Colt's revolver at his hip. Assuredly Stephens was no tenderfoot ; he was watching every motion of Backus out of the corner of his eye.

"Say, stranger," began the latter, leaning forward over the counter, and speaking low and clear, "no offence, but I want to ax you a certain question. It's a little sudden-like, but I have a reason for it ; allers no offence, you understand ?"

"You can ask me any question you have a mind to, Mr. Backus," said Stephens coolly. "Of course, whether I answer it or not is my choice."

Mr. Backus might be his fellow-countryman, but he must learn not to be presuming. Almost unconsciously to himself his tone hardened. Stephens could stand the easy familiarity of races that were not his own, and *treat the Indians* of Santiago with a friendliness that

was all the more kindly for his own underlying sense of superiority, but for an American to treat him lightly was another matter. The pride and reserve that had grown up in solitude revolted at this man's inquisitiveness.

“Wal' then, stranger,” continued Backus, with an apologetic manner that was due to the other's change of voice, “allers, as I said before, meanin' no offence, did you ever happen to kill a man?”

Manuelita, though apparently absorbed in a rose-sprigged muslin, caught a note in the Texan's tone that aroused her vigilance. She knew no English, but her quick brain divined that when he asked, “Did you ever kill a man?” he was putting no common question.

Stephens started at the abrupt query, and his face flushed. He paused a moment, looking hard at the other; then he slowly answered, “I don't *know* that I have ever killed anyone.”

“Meanin', I take it,” rejoined the other, “that you don't know for certain, neither, that you have n't. I ax yer pardon again, stranger, but as sure as God made little apples I've got a reason for what I'm saying. That ar' time you was in New Mexico years ago that you spoke of just now, was you, by any chance, at the battle of Apache Cañon?”

The words “Apache Cañon” sent a thrill through Manuelita; she knew well that there had been a bloody fight there.

“Yes,” answered Stephens, a strange new light beginning to dawn upon him; “I fought at Apache Cañon, if you must know.”

“You was on the Northern side, warn't you?” queried the storekeeper again.

"Yes," said the prospector quietly; "I was a volunteer in the Second Colorado Regiment."

"By gum, then, I knowed it!" cried the Texan excitedly; "you was one of the Pet Lambs."

At the beginning of the Civil War the Colorado troops, a pretty tough lot, were sometimes sportively alluded to as the "Pet Lambs."

A dry smile came to Stephens's lips at the sound of the old name. "I was a Lamb," said he.

"And I was one of Baylor's Babes," returned the other.

"Baylor's Babes" was the nickname bestowed upon a force of Texas rangers who invaded New Mexico, and had the audacity to propose to conquer the whole Rocky Mountain country for Jefferson Davis off their own bats.

"Yes, you bet I was a Babe," he repeated, "and a whale of a Babe at that, and hurraed for Jeff Davis as long as I could stand. But that's all over and done with now, and we've buried the war hatchet. But say, stranger, do you happen to recollect what kind of a wepping you was carrying at Apache Cañon? There warn't no Winchesters in them days," he added, patting the parcel of cartridges that lay on the counter.

"I was armed with a muzzle-loading Springfield U. S. rifle, altered in Denver to fire with a tape cap," replied Stephens. His nerves grew tense, and he braced himself for a possible struggle to the death, for he thought the Texan was about to spring on him; but he only asked with quaint earnestness:

"Du tell; what's a tape cap, mister?"

"Why, did you never see one?" said Stephens. "But of course they're out of date now. It was a dodge for capping a gun automatically. There was a

tape fitted with caps that was fed forward on top of the tube in front of the hammer. It worked like a charm. You bet there was no time lost fumbling around in your pouch for a cap with your fingers if you had one of them fixed on your gun.”

“Great Scot!” cried Backus, “then now I know how ’t was.”

He raised his hands so suddenly to the neck of his shirt that he made Stephens think he was reaching for the bowie-knife which some fighting men carry in a sheath under the coat at the back of the neck. Manuelita thought the same thing, and drew her breath hard, feeling her heart leap with terror. Instinctively Stephens’s fingers found the butt of his revolver, but he felt paralysed at the thought of the defenceless women by the counter. If there was to be a fuss, how could they make their escape before it began?

But Mr. Backus was not preparing to start a fuss, and he was not feeling for a weapon. He tore open the front of his shirt excitedly and bared his breast, and showed a livid bluish mark close beside the collar-bone.

“Strange!” he cried, “’t was you as give me that; ’t was that darned tape cap of yourn as done me. Now, don’t you remember?”

“By thunder, I do!” exclaimed Stephens. “You were the man I shot that day at close quarters. I recall your face now. I thought I ’d seen you before.”

“I knowed you the minute you set foot inside this door,” answered the Texan, drawing himself up, and eyeing Stephens keenly. “You see, you give me a good argyment for remembering you that day. Shake, partner,” he added quickly, thrusting out his bony right hand across the counter. “Bygones is bygones.

As I said just now, we 've buried the war hatchet for good, and *I* don't bear *you* no ill-will."

Was this a move to get him off his guard? Stephens felt more than half doubtful, but he decided to chance it, especially as he had a stout sheath-knife handy at his left hip. He loosed his fingers from the ready revolver butt, and the two strong hands met in a vigorous clasp.

CHAPTER VI

AN OLD WOUND REOPENED

IF it was a strange coincidence that had thus suddenly brought these two old foes together, face to face, in this remote quarter of New Mexico, it was a coincidence no less strange that they were both there for the same object. For Mr. Backus, too, was after the lost silver mine. Ever since his marriage with the daughter of a Mexican peasant he had made a tolerably easy living in a small way by keeping a country store, and in the knowledge which he thus gained of the common pursuits and dominant ideas among the Mexicans, what fascinated him particularly were the tales of hidden mines and buried treasures so often to be heard amongst them. Of all these tales, the legend of the secret mine of the Indians of Santiago had excited his interest most, so that when he learned that the San Remo stage station in their immediate neighbourhood was vacant, and afforded an opening for a store such as his, he speedily arranged to take charge of it and to transfer himself, his family, and his goods to the spot. He had as yet no definite plan of operations beyond keeping his ears open for every scrap of information that might come into his way from any quarter, and doing all he knew to ingratiate himself with the Indians themselves; but the very first step he had proposed to take was to find out about this white man who was said to be living

among them, and to discover what his objects were and how much he knew. Fortune had favoured him so far, and here he was shaking hands with the man himself, who had thus unexpectedly proved to be no other than his ancient enemy.

At the moment when the pair were thus exchanging signs of amity, the doorway was darkened by the form of a tall, swarthy, well-dressed Mexican. Mr. Backus hailed the new-comer instantly.

"Welcome, Don Nepomuceno. You come at a good hour. See the wonderful thing that has happened. This American señor that you were telling me of only yesterday, who lives with the Indians of Santiago, has turned out to be the very same man that plugged me in the great fight at Apache Cañon nine years ago. We were just shaking hands over it as you came in, and I've been showing him a little mark over my lungs that he gave me as a remembrancer." Mr. Backus was speaking in Spanish, and Manuelita was drinking in every syllable with intense interest.

"Well, if you come to that," returned Stephens, baring his left arm and displaying the scar of an old bullet wound between the elbow and wrist, "I can do ditto. Perhaps you did n't know that your bullet took me through the fleshy part of the arm here," and he pointed with his finger to the place where the ball had entered.

Don Nepomuceno Sanchez, who had seen fighting in the wars with the Navajos, and knew well what wounds were, came forward to examine the scars of either man with critical eyes. "Truly these are honourable scars," he said; "tell me about it, please, if you don't mind talking over old war times."

"Well, señor," said Backus, in his rapid, fluent

Spanish, "it was like this: we were fighting there in the hills, on opposite sides, as of course you know; and naturally, being all frontiersmen on both sides, we advanced under cover as much as ever we could, firing as we got a chance. And so it came about that he and I, sudden-like, found ourselves quite close to one another in the brush, and we both fired as it might be at the same moment. He must have missed me clean that time, but according to the way he tells it, I must have plugged him right through that left arm of his; I did n't even know as I'd touched him though, for it never seemed to phase him, and we both of us set to reloading in a hurry, you bet. We both put in the powder, and both rammed down the bullets, and I had got a trifle ahead of him as I brought up my gun to the hip in order to have it ready to put on the cap. Wal', I'm jiggered if he did n't leave out the capping part of the business, and brought his piece straight up to his shoulder to draw a bead on me. You bet I just thought I knowed as I'd got the deadwood on him then. 'Got ye, Yank,' I called out, slipping the cap on my tube, 'ye haint capped yer gun.' 'Don't want to,' sez he; and whang-g-g! she went, and took me right here through the lung; and that was the last I ever knowed of anything for about a day and a half. You see, he had some kind of a gol-durned, stem-winding trick on his gun that did the capping for him, that I did n't know nothing about."

"Well, now it's all over," said Stephens frankly, "I'm real glad to learn that your wound was n't mortal. My company fell back directly after we exchanged shots, so that I never knew what had become of you."

"Oh," said the Texan, "they patched me up in the

hospital somehow or another, and then I was took in and nursed in a Mexican family, and the end of it was I married one of the darters and settled in the Territory, and here I am with a wife and three kids, and running a store. I do keep a little good whisky, too, you may like to know. Say, won't you take a drink? It's my treat. You'll join us in a *tragito*, won't you, Don Nepomuceno?"

"I'll drink with you with pleasure," said Stephens, "if you'll allow me to take it in something like a lemon soda. Whisky's a thing I don't use, if you'll excuse me."

"Surely, surely," in amiable tones remarked Mr. Backus, who was setting out on the counter a three-parts full decanter and some glasses. "I'll try and mix something of the lemon-soda order as near as I can fix it." He had hoped to get Stephens into a loquacious mood and pump him over a few social drinks, but he was too cunning to show any trace of disappointment. "Every man has a right to choose his own liquor; I don't quarrel with no man's taste," he said, as he passed the decanter to Don Nepomuceno, with a familiar "Help yourself, friend," and busied himself in searching for materials for concocting some kind of a temperance drink for his other guest.

Sanchez poured a little of the strong spirit into a glass and filled it up with water. "You are coming to take dinner in my house presently, are you not, Don Estevan?" he said in his courteous tones, addressing Stephens, who accepted the invitation cordially. "Manuelita, my child," he turned to his eldest daughter, "run home now quick with Altagracia, and tell your aunt that Don Estevan is coming and to have *dinner ready soon.*"

The temperance drink was compounded, and the three men clinked glasses and pledged each other.

"And what have you bin' doing ever since our last meeting?" said Mr. Backus genially to his former foe. "I've give ye my story; now let's hear yours."

"Mining," said Stephens with curt emphasis. The word made the Texan give a start of surprise. "Yes," he continued, "it's mining and prospecting for gold and silver that has been my trade ever since; and, what's more, I've travelled over a good part of the Pacific slope at it, too. It's a game you get terribly stuck on after once you take to it."

"Mining, eh?" said the Texan with affected indifference. "Wal', that ar's a thing as I dunno nothin' at all about."

He gave a careless laugh. "Oh, by the way," he said, turning his back on the two men and rummaging on the shelf behind him for a couple of cans of oysters which he displayed with a great show of earnestness, "that's the brand of oysters, Don Nepomuceno, that I meant to bring to your notice, first chance. I can recommend 'em; they're prime."

"Yes," he continued, turning again to Stephens, "you was saying as how you was interested in mines; but as far as that goes, why there ain't no mines being worked in this part of the country, not as I know of." A suspicious man might have guessed that Backus's interest in the possibility of a mine in the neighbourhood of Santiago was a good deal stronger than he chose to let appear, but John Stephens was not of a suspicious nature.

"No," he said in reply, "there are n't any now, but there have been, and there will be again, if I'm any judge." Then, reflecting that he might say too

much, and checking himself he went on more cautiously. "But I don't see any opening here myself. I guess I 'm about through with New Mexico for the present, and I calculate to light out for Colorado pretty soon. The railroads have got in there, and there 's a boom on."

Mr. Backus was sharp at reading other people's motives, and saw in an instant that Stephens was trying to disguise his. So much the more reason for finding out what they were.

"What! going off to Colorado?" he exclaimed with an air of surprise. "Why, I 'd understood from the folks here that you had settled down in Santiago for keeps. That 's really how I come to hear of you; I heard that you was a white man living amongst them Indians, and had joined the tribe; so I supposed you was adopted by them, and had gone and got hitched up with a squaw."

Stephens's eyes flashed.

"Should n't wonder if that drew him out a bit," reflected Mr. Backus privately to himself.

"If anyone told you so," said the prospector stiffly, "let me tell you that you have been misinformed. No, sir, squaws are n't in my line; I 'm not that sort of a man. I never have proposed to go outside of my own colour, and I never will."

Mr. Backus gave a short laugh. The word colour touched him on the raw. He was married to a Mexican, and many Americans are indiscriminating enough to class the Mexicans with coloured people. The Mexicans themselves naturally resent such a slight on their race; although a part of them have more or less Indian blood in their veins, they prefer to ignore that side of *their pedigree* and trace their descent solely back to the

conquering cavaliers of Spain. But Mr. Backus was himself a quarter-blooded Indian. He called himself a Texan, and passed as such; though he was born in the Indian Territory and his mother had been a half-breed Cherokee.

He changed the subject abruptly. "Fill your glass again, Don," he said, pushing the decanter towards the Mexican. "It's good whiskey, real old Bourbon. 'There is n't a headache in a hog's head of it,' as the Irishman said."

"A thousand thanks, no, if you will excuse me," replied the Mexican, "I have sufficient. I think I must be going," he went on, for indeed he felt a little out of it, seeing that the two Americans had dropped back instinctively into talking in their own language, of which he knew but a few words. "I shall see you again, then, presently, Don Estevan, at my house," and bowing politely he departed homewards.

"That man's darned well fixed, I can tell you," remarked the storekeeper, refilling his own glass and tossing it off as soon as the Mexican had gone. "And what's more, he's a square man, too. I don't mind saying that Nepomuceno Sanchez can just have all the credit he wants at this store. He's one of the heirs to the Sanchez grant, and that gives him the use of all the pasture land he needs for his sheep. He's a very peart business man, for a Mexican. I used to come across him over in Peña Blanca, you know. He's a relation of old man Baca's by marriage, and he's got a lot of his sheep on shares and makes a good thing of it."

The personage irreverently referred to by the Texan as "old man Baca" was the head of the family of that name, and a man of no small position and wealth. The old families of New Mexico own immense flocks of

hardy little Mexican sheep, whose numbers often run into hundreds of thousands. Their flocks are divided into bands of a few thousand and let out on shares to retainers, who return a rent in kind of the wool and the increase. The relation between these retainers and the heads of the great families is semi-feudal.

"Yes," said Stephens, "taking sheep on shares is a good business. I've seen his son, young Andrés Sanchez, up there on that Sanchez grant with their sheep herd when I've been out on the mountains."

"Oh, you've been up on the mountains round here?" said Backus, who saw his chance to lead the conversation once more in the direction he wanted. "Mining, I suppose?" he added, as if it were an afterthought.

"Well, I've prospected some," returned the other. "But you've heard me say I did n't think much of the opening here."

"Ever take any of the Indians out prospecting with you?" inquired the Texan. "They've bin here so long they'd ought to know if there's anything lying around worth looking at. Did they never tell you anything about mines?" He let these last words fall after a pause with studied carelessness.

"No, sir," said the prospector, "I've learnt nothing from the Indians, and it's highly possible that they've nothing to tell."

"You never thought to ask 'em, I suppose?" suggested Backus.

"Why should I?" returned the other quietly. "May I ask, Mr. Backus, if you've any special reason for these questions?"

The Texan hesitated; he felt sure now that his old *antagonist* was not at Santiago by mere chance, but

had an object in view which he did not care to disclose. He quickly decided to try and gain his confidence by a show of openness.

"Wal', yes, I have," he admitted ; " I guess I 've got some information that might be of value to anyone as knew how to use it."

" What could he mean ? " Stephens thought. " Was this information the knowledge of the secret mine ? If so, it might be worth while to make terms with him, as the Indians seemed to be so impracticable."

" If anyone will show me a mine," said the prospector, " I can tell him if it 's worth working, and how to work it."

" Yes," returned Backus, " and if so what terms would you expect ? "

" A half-interest," said Stephens. " If I thought it good enough I 'd take a half-interest and bear my share of the expenses."

" That 's a square offer," replied the Texan. " Now look at here. Now, s'posin' I was to tell you of a mine in this neighbourhood, you 'd be willing to do that with me ? "

" Are you referring to the lost mine of the Indians ? " asked the prospector. It was not worth while to make any further mystery of the matter, for the Texan had obviously heard the story.

" That 's just what I am," said Backus. " I thought as how you must have heard some talk about it. Now you allow as you don't know where it is."

" I do not," said the other.

" Wal', I do," said Backus. " And I'll tell it to you on your own terms, and that 's a half-interest for each of us. It's on the Indian grant up in the mountains."

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"Well, I knew that much," said Stephens.

"Ah," returned the Texan, "but I can tell you more'n that. The Indians haint got no right to keep it; that grant haint been confirmed to them by act of Congress."

"But, my dear sir," returned Stephens, with something that savoured of contempt, "you're revealing to me as your precious secret what's matter of common knowledge. If you ask anyone in the office at Santa Fé, they'll tell you that the grant to the Indians of four square leagues round the pueblo has been confirmed to them, and that they own it from grass-roots to Hades by a perfectly indefeasible title; but they'll tell you there, too, in the office, that the twenty miles square that they claim in the mountains has never been confirmed, and for that matter is overlapped by half a dozen unconfirmed Mexican grants as well. The real title to that land is in the United States Government. That's as old as a last year's bird's-nest."

"I see you're well posted in the business," said Backus; "but maybe you don't know that the secret mine's on the Cerro de las Viboras. I can tell you that."

"If you can show it to me up there on that Rattlesnake Mountain, Mr. Backus," was Stephens's reply, "I'm ready to acknowledge at once that you'll show me something I don't know. But as you know so much you are probably aware that the mine has been closed for a hundred years or more, and that rumour locates it in a dozen different places, and that to look for it on the Cerro without knowing where it is is to look for a needle in a haystack. I've been all around *that Cerro*, you can bet, but I have n't run across the

mine. The Cerro 's a mountain five miles round and five thousand feet high, and a precious rough mountain at that. I 'm willing to go up there again ; I 'm ready to start to-morrow if you like ; and if you 'll show me the mine there I 'm ready to do as I said with you about working it ; but unless you can do that I don't consider that what has passed constitutes any claim between us on either side."

"Wal'," said the Texan, "I could n't leave the store here just yet, not till I get things straightened out and settled down. Nor I won't swear for sartin as I can put you right on to the exact spot, seein' as how I 've not been up thar myself yet ; but mebbe I can before long, and I reckon that ought to be enough for ye. Say, look here, could n't we work it between us, somehow, to get them Indians to show us the spot?"

This intrusive Texan had so far told Stephens nothing he did not know already, and now here he was wanting to poach on the prospector's private preserve—his personal influence with the Indians.

"That 's what I 've been trying to do already, Mr. Backus," said Stephens irritably ; "and, to be plain with you, I 'm not looking out for a partner in this matter."

"Ah, but mebbe that 's just what you want," returned the storekeeper imperturbably ; "mebbe the reason as you haint won nary trick so far is that you 've bin playing a lone hand. Now, I 'll gamble from what you said just now that you 've bin trying to get the secret out of the bucks over there, and that you have n't tried the women for it at all. Now, aint I right?" and he gave the other a cunning look.

"I 've never seen any reason to think that the women know anything about it," returned Stephens.

"It is n't likely they would." The idea had never even occurred to him.

"Ah, and I 'll gamble they do," replied Backus. "I know a thing or two about Indians myself, and it 's a great trick of theirs to let some of the squaws—only some, mind you—keep some of the secrets of the tribe. You see they don't go and get killed off like the bucks, so it acts as a kind of safeguard against losing the knowledge of a thing entirely that way. Aint there some extra high-toned women, now, in the Santiago tribe,—chief's darters and the like, eh?" His keen black eyes were turned on the other with a cunning inquisitiveness. "Yes, by the way, aint there a white squaw in the tribe somewheres?"

Stephens was startled. "You 've taken a lot of trouble to find out things, I fancy, Mr. Backus," he said rather suspiciously; "a great deal more, indeed, than you seemed inclined to let on at first. But you 're quite right. Yes, there is a white squaw in the tribe, and she 's the daughter of the cacique."

Backus listened with extreme interest. "You reckon she 's an Indian, then?" he said. "You don't think she 's a white girl they 've picked up and adopted, by any chance? I 've seen a good few sorts of Indians, but never any white ones yet."

"Oh no, she 's Indian, right enough," said Stephens; "she 's a natural Indian blonde, as fair-complected as I am. They 're none so rare among these Pueblo Indians. There 's twenty or thirty of them over in Zufii."

"I wanter know!" exclaimed the Texan, by which phrase he indicated extreme surprise. "Wal', she might be worth trying. The cacique had ought to know the secret if anybody does, and she 'd be as likely

as any of the squaws to be let into it. Why should n't you tackle her? Is she married?"

"No, she's not married yet," replied the other.

"Wal', there's yer chance," said the storekeeper, with a knowing grin; "but I forgot, you draw the line pretty close in the matter of colour; or mebbe, she being light-complected as yourself, you'd reckon she was white enough to suit you."

Stephens flushed; he had given this man no right to intrude these familiarities upon him; in silence he picked up his parcels to go. When you have just been forgiven by a man for shooting him through the lungs, you can hardly blaze out at him for being a trifle too personal in his conversation.

"Wal', I'm going to be up there right along," continued the storekeeper, seeing that Stephens volunteered no further comment, and was preparing to start, "and then you can introduce me. I'm going to make a bid for the trade of the pueblo anyhow, and I'll have to get on the right side of the cacique for that, and I might as well get the inside track with the girl, too. It's all in the family, eh?" He grinned again with a kind of a grin that Stephens loathed. "And 't won't be trespassing on your property neither, I s'pose?"

"I leave the Indian women alone, Mr. Backus, as I think I told you before," said Stephens haughtily, and he drew himself up and moved to the door.

"Oh, no offence," cried the other quickly, following him; "I see you're high-toned, of course. I did n't mean nothing low-down, nohow"; he attended the prospector out to the hitching-post, where the mule was fastened, and watched him as he put the parcels into his saddle-bags.

"That's a real nice California saddle of yourn,"

he said in a propitiatory tone, "and an Ar mule wearing it. Wal', when are you going to ask me to come and meet Miss Pocahontas?"

"I'm afraid I'm off to the sierra to-morrow on a hunt," was the somewhat ungracious reply, "but we may meet again later on when I come back, before I start for Colorado, if I decide after all to go there"; and he swung himself into his saddle and raised his bridle rein.

"What makes ye so sot on leavin' this Territory?" queried Backus, laying his hand on the mule's neck and walking a few paces alongside the parting guest. "Aint it most time for ye to quit all this rovin' round, and settle down? Why don't you ask Don Nepomuceno, now, for his darter? She's gone on you already, if you only knowed it. When you was fingering your revolver there in the store just now—oh, I seen what your little game was, right enough—her eyes was just glued to you. Oh yes; if I was watching you close, right along the hull time, you bet I kept my little eye open for what the women thought of it all as well. You bet I aint no innercent; I aint bin and lived here these seven years in New Mexico without learning to watch the women every time. I'm on the spot there, and no mistake. I know how a girl looks when she thinks as how her man's in danger that she's gone on. You ask her father for her, and you'll find you've got the inside track there, or my name aint Tom Backus."

"Really, Mr. Backus," replied Stephens, "you've set yourself to discuss a matter I prefer not to talk about. I think I'll say good morning now."

With a regretful air Mr. Backus removed his hand *from the mule's neck*, and remained there still looking

at Stephens's back, while the animal he bestrode, feeling its rider's spurs, quickened its pace.

"Wal', so long," he cried after him as the distance between them rapidly increased. "You'd better think over that idea of mine. Take care of yerself now. Good men is scarce"—"and prospectors who know a mine when they see it are scarcer, just now, in this part of the world," he continued to himself. "I've no fancy to have you putting out for Colorado till you've done my bit of work for me down here, Mister Stephens. If I can once get you to fooling with that squaw girl, I'll bet a dollar you can get the secret of the Indians' silver mine out of her; and if she ain't enough to keep you here you may sport around after Miss Manuelita, but stop here you must till you've found that mine for me. You find it and I take the profits, that's fair division," and he gave a chuckle of satisfaction; "and when the time comes for paying you your share, you'll find I haint forgotten how to shoot. Lord! what luck to drop on you like this, and you as innercent as a new-born babby, for all your fingering your six-shooter the way you did. I reckon you'll just play the cards as I deal 'em, and never spot me a-raising a cold deck on you, as I will."

CHAPTER VII

DESDEMONA LISTENS

IT was but slowly that Manuelita obeyed her father's order to return home ; her little feet lagged as the girl dwelt on the scene she had just witnessed, and wondered what it meant. Somehow this American always set her wondering about something. His very unlikeness to the men whom she had hitherto lived among made him appear almost as strange to her as a visitor from another world. He had begun by half repelling, and had ended by fascinating her ; on this point the guess of the coarse-minded but quick-witted Texan was not mistaken. Although in speech and manners, in all his tastes and habits, Stephens offered a complete contrast to her Mexican fellow-countrymen, he himself with his light hair and fair complexion was not a type absolutely new to this girl, for in the place of honour in her grandfather's dining-room had hung a portrait of a golden-haired *caballero*, the great Manuel Sanchez, the friend of Cortez ; and Manuelita had woven so many romantic dreams about her glorious ancestor that this fair-haired American had come to seem to her a sort of copy of her hero of romance. It was only in dreams and traditions that the girl had met with heroes ; the secluded life led by Mexican ladies was in her case more solitary than usual, for the *Sanchez* family was poor (poor for its position, that is)

but proud, and Manuelita turned up her pretty nose at the few young rancheros of the neighbourhood, and held them beneath the notice of the daughter of a *conquistador*. The girl's passionate southern nature, with all its capacity for devotion, had slept longer than was usual among her people, and when her heart should awake it would be the heart of a woman, not of a schoolgirl. The young rancheros flaunted their silver spurs and velvet jackets at the Fiestas in vain; they swore the señorita was as wild as an antelope; and, like an antelope, she was caught by her curiosity. She could not keep from speculating on the strange character of this American who bore the golden locks of her great ancestor. The character of a handsome young man is a dangerous study for the peace of mind of a girl, and her interest in the stranger grew so rapidly that soon it seemed to her that there was little else worth studying "beneath the visiting moon."

Nor was the opportunity lacking. Stephens had struck up quite a friendship with her father in the course of the winter, and had got into the way, especially on mail days, of dropping in for a chat with his Mexican crony, who, within his somewhat narrow intellectual limits, was a man both of strong character and active mind. She had listened to them talking together by the hour. The Mexican had many incidents to tell of the ceaseless struggles of his people with the marauding Navajo Indians, who had been but lately reduced to subjection, and of the hardly less constant struggle between the rival great families, the Bacas, the Armijos, the Chavez, and the rest, for supremacy among themselves. The American found no lack of matter in the tale of his wanderings between the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains, and of the toils and

hopes of a seeker after gold. To her, directly, he had not spoken very much ; as an unmarried girl, under the watchful tutelage of her aunt, she was not expected to take a prominent part in conversation, but she went and came freely between the living-room where her father entertained his guest, and the sleeping-chambers which opened off it and the kitchen communicating with it on the other side.

Once, too, it had been her luck to see the American perform a feat that impressed her not a little. She had gone out one evening with Juana, the Navajo captive who had been brought up in the house as a bond-servant, to bring in the milk from the corral, when she caught sight in the dusk of an animal prowling near that seemed like a dog, and yet was assuredly something other than a dog. The two girls ran indoors, crying out that there was a wild beast of some kind, a wolf they thought, close by, and Stephens, who was sitting with her father, sprang up, seized his Winchester, which stood in the corner, and hastily threw a cartridge into it as he stepped forth, while she followed to point out the marauder. There, in the dim light, some seventy yards away, the animal stood, hesitating whether to advance or to fly. She well remembered the quick, smooth, steady action with which the rifle came up, came level, went off ; the loud clap of the bullet hitting the object ; and the nonchalant way in which the tall American had turned on his heel and, without any apparent interest in the effect of his shot, had gone in and replaced the rifle in its corner, merely remarking, " I reckon it 's nothing but a coyote."

Pedro, the peon, had run to see, and presently brought in the limp body of the animal, a coyote as he had guessed, its skull shattered to a pulp by the deadly

hollow bullet. But what impressed her more than the death-dealing powers of the terrible weapon, was the quiet confidence exhibited by the marksman in his rapid aim, a confidence so entirely justified by the event; and it was this that struck deep into her imagination.

Yes, in her eyes, without doubt, the American was a hero; and yet he was but a cold-hearted hero after all. He could turn a compliment because he had picked up the trick of it from the young Mexicans whom he met occasionally in Don Nepomuceno's house, but his compliments lacked the fanciful gallantry of the words of her countrymen; yes, he was hard, she was sure of it, hard and cold as the ice-bound soil of his own frozen North; she would waste no more thoughts on him, she resolved; and then she thought of him more than ever, and it was in such a mood as this that she re-entered her father's door.

When Stephens turned his back somewhat ungraciously on Mr. Backus in front of the stage station, he rode off without casting a look behind him, and urged his mule forward at an easy amble towards the house where he was expected. Those last words of the store-keeper had jarred on him very unpleasantly. Who had asked this intruder to spy on the expression of the girl's face? What business was it of his anyhow? Of course it was all rubbish. He himself had never said a single word to Manuelita that all the world might not hear. Of course he had to pay her a compliment once in a while; he could hardly do less, coming and going at the house as he did, and all these Mexican señoras and señoritas expected it, just as the girls back in Ohio expected you to treat them to candy and ice-cream. That never meant anything particular, neither

did his compliments, and she was much too sensible a girl to think they did. It was characteristic of the man that he never for a moment thought of himself as likely by his person and his character to make an impression on a girl's heart. The idea that came into his head when Backus made the suggestion was that if there was anything in it it must be due to this precious art of paying compliments, which was about the only point in Mexican manners that he had taken any special pains to acquire. But the whole thing was rubbish, so he assured himself again and again. Sanchez was no fool, and no more was his daughter. They were kindly people, who had behaved with true Mexican hospitality to a stranger—but they were people of another race : their customs, their beliefs, their ideals, were all strange to him. Between an American and a Mexican there could be no real community of feeling. And yet some Americans did marry Mexicans, and did not seem to repent it. Even that low-down skunk of a storekeeper, who was an American of sorts, had a Mexican wife. Probably she was not much to boast of, a mere peon's daughter most likely,—well, that was his taste. But there were other Americans who had Mexican wives ; he could count up several whom he had seen in Santa Fé,—traders, Government employés, and the like,—and they had as comfortable homes as if they had gone back to the States and married American girls. But confound that Backus's impudence ! What should he know about these Sanchez folks anyway ?

Beneath all this anger lay two very uncomfortable suspicions. One was that the storekeeper was a man with a great deal of low cunning, and might have, as indeed he boasted, most confoundedly sharp eyes for prying into other people's affairs ; and the other was

that he, Stephens, had never given such an affair as this a serious thought before, and knew precious little about womankind in general ; and this last thought of his was much truer than he himself realised.

There are no men whose experience of women, as a rule, is so small as the pioneers of a new country. In older countries there are unmarried men in plenty, but they are brought into frequent daily contact with the other sex unless they take deliberate pains to prevent it, and not seldom they prove to understand women better than those who might be supposed to have a better right. But the celibates of a new country are quite different. In their case it is not choice but necessity that makes the mere sight of a woman's face a rare thing. In the wild, remote mining camps where Stephens's years of adventure had been mostly passed, among a thousand men there would barely be a score or so who ever brought their women-folks along. True enough, where the miners had struck it rich, and hundreds and thousands of dollars were being taken out by eager crowds of men, another class of women did not delay long in appearing upon the scene; but that was a class from which Stephens studiously kept aloof. He had not even the perverted experience that may be thus gained ; and he positively knew less at nine-and-twenty about the ways in which girls think and feel than he had known before he left home at nineteen. If he knew little he had been contented with his ignorance, but now this random shaft of the storekeeper had gone home, and he was contented no longer.

Alighting from Captain Jinks before Don Nepomuceno's door, he was welcomed by the Mexican, who insisted on unsaddling the mule for him himself, loudly calling meanwhile for Pedro to come and take him round

to the corral and give him some corn. The house was built in Mexican style, of sun-dried bricks, in the form of a hollow square, with a patio, or courtyard, in the centre on which all the doors and windows gave, the outer wall being blank except for a peephole or two high up. It had a flat clay roof, with a low parapet all round. It was, in fact, a miniature castle, as was every house in the country of any pretensions built during the days when the Navajos and Apaches were a constant terror in the land. Stephens followed his host inside after taking off his spurs, Spanish fashion. He had unbuckled his belt and handed it, revolver and all, to his host, begging him to take charge of it. This, too, he had learned was a piece of Spanish etiquette. You give him your arms to keep, for you are under his protection. Don Nepomuceno bustled around, laying the saddle with its "cantines" neatly in a corner, with the saddle blanket over it, and hanging up the belt on a peg, while he kept calling out to his sister to bring in the dinner, and to the Navajo captive, Juana, to bring water for washing. There were no chairs or tables, but a broad divan covered with gaily striped serapes ran all along one side of the room and served as a seat.

On this Stephens sat down, and, while the master of the house showed his hospitable ardour by urging the women in the kitchen to make a wholly unnecessary haste, the American drew from his pocket the letter he had received at the stage station, and proceeded to read it. It ran as follows :

"THE WHAT CHEER HOUSE, DENVER, COL.,

"April 2, 187-.

"*To Mr. John Stephens, among the Pueblo Indians of Santiago, N. M.*

"*FRIEND STEPHENS,—It's two years and a half ago that you*

and me parted company in Helena, Montana, after I'd done my best to bust you that time, you remember. I've knocked around and had my ups and downs since, but I have n't done so badly on the whole. Last summer I was in Col. here, and I got on to a goodish thing up on Boulder. I wish you would come up here this summer and join me in trying to work it, for I think if it was handled right there's big money in it for both of us. I don't want to say too much, for I don't feel plumb sure of this letter reaching you. And for the same reason I don't put in a draft for what I owe you still, but I've got it here for you all right and regular, and if you can't come you've only got to let me know where and how to send it, and it's yours. I'm well enough fixed now to be able to do it right enough. I don't know if there's any chance of this letter finding you. I have n't heard sign or sound of you since we quit being pardners, till yesterday I run on to that Sam Argles as you may remember in Helena in old times; he'd been wintering away down in Arizona, and he said as how when he was passing through New Mexico a stage driver there told him as he knowed of a white man, calling himself John Stephens, that had been a miner, and was living now with the Indians of Santiago, N. M. That Sam Argles is an old gasbag, sure, but I had to allow as it sounded like you in some ways, for he said the driver said this Stephens would n't never drink nor gamble; but he said too another thing, that he was living there with 'em as a squawman, and then I did n't hardly believe as it could be you, but I guessed that stage driver might have been lying, and so figuring on it like that I calculated I might as well write you there. Hoping as it is you, and that you're going strong and doing fine, I remain, your former pard,

"JEFF. A. ROCKYFELLER.

"You can address me, care of Hepburn & Davis, 397 Arapahoe, Denver."

Stephens perused this letter with a dry smile upon his face.

"Yes, Rocky," he said, apostrophising his ex-partner, "it's me, sure pop, that Mr. Sam Argles heard of here; but I'm not a squawman yet, not

quite ; you were right not to believe that, not if all the darned fool stage drivers in the country were to swear to it."

By the code of the West, a squawman is nothing less than a renegade to his own race, and is hated accordingly.

He refolded the letter and placed it back in his pocket, as Juana appeared bearing a towel and soap and a bowl, which she placed on the clean-swept floor in front of him preparatory to aiding him to wash by pouring a little stream of water over his hands. The Navajo handmaiden, having been captured as a child, had been brought up in Mexican style, but her blood was pure Indian; that showed plainly in her impassive face as she held the towel for him to wipe his hands, and the strong animal expression given by the heavy jaw and dark skin struck him forcibly. He wondered what she was thinking of as she stood there as still as if she had been cast in bronze, and he reflected, with some disgust at his own stupidity, that that 'cute store-keeper down below could probably have made a pretty accurate guess. Yes, in future he positively would pay more attention to what women were thinking about. In that respect there was no doubt he must amend his ways.

At last Don Nepomuceno condescended to settle down and seat himself on the divan beside his guest ; a low table was brought in and placed before them, and on it were set two bowls of rich mutton-broth. When the empty bowls were removed by Juana, the master of the house called out loudly, so as to be heard in the kitchen through the open door, " It is very excellent broth ! Ah, what capital broth ! "

" *I have often heard it said,*" remarked Stephens,

by way of showing his appreciation, "that the Mexican ladies make the best soup in the world."

"It is true, Don Estevan, it is quite true. They are capital cooks, capital. I wonder now, Don Estevan, that you can be contented to cook for yourself. Cooking seems such a waste of time for a man!"

Stephens laughed. "It's my bad luck, señor," he said. "You see, the ladies would n't ever look at a rover like myself."

"Don't you believe it, don't you believe it," cried the other; "indeed you have no call to say so. Ah, here is the stew," he added, as Juana set down before each of them two small saucers, one of frijoles, or Mexican beans boiled with onions, and one of stewed mutton with red pepper; in fact both dishes were made nearly red-hot by a liberal admixture of the famous chili colorado. For bread she laid before them tortillas, large thin pancakes of the blue Indian corn, peculiar to New Mexico.

Following the example of his host, Stephens broke off a piece of tortilla, formed it into a scoop, and dipping up mouthfuls of the two messes alternately, thus consumed both bread and meat together. His host's approval of this course was delivered for the benefit of the kitchen as emphatically as it had been of the soup.

"It is very savoury meat," he shouted in his commanding voice, as soon as he had tasted two or three mouthfuls from each saucer, "very savoury; and they are excellent beans, delicious beans. Ah yes, Don Estevan," he continued to his guest, "what a pity it is that you have not someone to cook for you like this. To live all by yourself is so solitary, so *triste*."

"Yes," answered the American quietly; "but how should I do when I went off to the mountains prospect-

ing? I'm off again, I expect, shortly, to Colorado, you see; and what would I do with the cook then?"

"But why do you go?" queried his host. "Is it not time for you to leave off this wandering, roving life of yours and settle down? You are rich, everybody knows. You should marry, man, marry, and enjoy yourself"; he dropped into a more familiar tone,—“yes, marry before old age comes. You are a young man still, but age will be upon you before you know it.”

Stephens, instead of giving a direct answer, made play with the tortilla and the stew. "I do begin to believe that cunning Backus was nearer right than I had any idea of," he said to himself. "I suppose this means that my good friend here wants to suggest that he'll find me a wife in short order if I say so—only, as it happens, he's a little too previous; I aint ready just yet." By this time he had consumed sufficient of the stew to set a dry man on fire, and utilised this fact to change the subject.

"Excuse me," said he, "but may I, by your permission, beg for a drink of water? This meat is delicious, but the chili makes me rather thirsty."

"Oh, certainly," cried his hospitable host; "but we have coffee coming. We have coffee here. Bring the coffee, Juana, at once," he shouted to the bondmaid.

"Water, please, if I may be so bold, Don Nepomuceno," pleaded Stephens, whose mouth was really burning.

"Yes, yes; bring water, then, Juana," cried the other, anxious to accommodate his guest. "Or would you not like a little atole? There is atole, too, plenty of it."

Atole is an old and favourite Mexican drink made of the finest Indian corn meal boiled till it becomes a thin gruel.

A jug of atole presently appeared with two cups, and the American was permitted to ease the burning sensations of his palate.

"Thank you," he said gratefully, putting down the cup; "that's very refreshing. Atole is a real good drink, Don Nepomuceno."

"Oh, yes," said the latter, "it's a good drink enough; but now that coffee has come in so much, it is used more by our handmaidens and the peons. All the well-to-do people here buy coffee, with sugar, now. We will have the coffee in in a minute. Tell them to make haste with the coffee, Juana. Did you never hear," he continued to Stephens, "the song that the musician of San Remo has made about Mr. Coffee and Mr. Atole? It is comic, you must know, very comic. You see Mr. Coffee comes from far, far away off in Tamaulipas, or farther still, to cut out his rival Mr. Atole. And then they meet, and the pair have a conversation, and Mr. Coffee tells poor Mr. Atole that he is doomed. Let me see, how does it go? Oh yes, Mr. Coffee begins, and he says to the other jokingly:

" ' Como te va, amigo Atole?
Como has pasado tu tiempo;
Desde lejos hé venido
Para hacer tu testamento.' "

" ' How do you do, Mr. Gruel?
I fear you are rather unwell;
I've taken a mighty long journey
To ring your funeral knell.' "

That's how it goes, Don Estevan. There's a great

deal more of it ; they go on arguing ever so long. We must get him in some time and make him repeat it all for you."

" You 're most kind, I 'm sure," said the American, wondering in himself the while how any human being could be amused by such a rigmarole concerning Messrs. Coffee and Atole. But there was no accounting for tastes ; and he had found out that American humour did not seem at all funny to Mexican ears, while his recent experience in blasting the ditch had taught him that the mildest of American jokes might send red Indians on the war-path. A difference in the sense of humour goes down to the very roots of our nature.

They had finished dinner by this time, and the American, declining a cigarette, filled his pipe, and rising went over to his saddle and extracted from the " cantines " the packet which had come for him by mail. He brought this over to his host and offered it to him.

" Here, señor," said he, " is a little bag I will beg you to accept. It is from Denver ; it contains some seed of alfalfa, that clover I told you about, that grows so splendidly in California and Colorado."

The Mexican was warm in his thanks as he untied the bag and took a sample in his hand.

" I told them to send me the best seed," said Stephens. " I think it ought to grow well in this country. You 'd better sow it soon in a piece of your ploughed land, and irrigate it when it comes up."

" Yes, I will," said the Mexican. " I 'll have it planted to-morrow in the land I am preparing for corn. Come and see my seed corn ; I am not content with *this common* blue corn of the Indians. I have white

corn with big ears that I mean to sow. Come along to the storeroom and look at it."

He led the way, and as they passed through the door they almost stepped over Manuelita, who was seated on the ground just outside, busy cleaning a large basket of frijoles. Stephens paused idly to look at what she was doing, while her father bustled around, noisily demanding of his sister where the key of the storeroom was. The girl's task struck him as terribly tedious. She took up a small handful of beans at a time and picked out one by one the little bits of stone that had got in when the threshing was done, in the good old style, by the feet of the wild mares on a floor of clay and gravel concrete.

"That 's a long business you 're in there," he remarked sympathetically.

"Yes," she answered, glancing up at him with a shy smile, "it takes time," and she bent her eyes on her hand again so as not to interrupt her work. He caught the beautiful smooth outline of her cheek with the long dark lashes showing distinct against it.

"You don't mean to say you have to do the lot that way, picking out all those bits of rock one at a time?" he asked.

"Oh, but yes, of course," she answered. "You would break your teeth if we did not take them out before we cook them."

"But," he rejoined, his practical mind revolting against waste of labour, "it 'll take you a good hour to do that lot the way you 're doing it, and you could do it better in three minutes." His tone was oracular.

"I don't think it 's possible," she said, "unless you had a witch to do it. There is an old woman, the mother of Pedro, that we get sometimes, but she often

leaves some in, and then my father hurts his teeth. The people here call her a witch, but she would take three hours instead of three minutes."

"Well, I'm no witch," said he, "though the Indians here wanted to play me for one this morning. But you give me a pan—a milk-pan 'll do—and I'll show you."

The pan was brought, and he put in the beans and poured in water enough to set them a-swim. He gave the pan a few deft twirls and shook it from side to side.

"This is the way we wash gravel to get the gold, señorita," he said, as he set it down. "The rocks are all at the bottom of that pan now, you bet. If you'll kindly give me another pan to put the beans into," he went on, "I'll prove it to you."

The girl hastened to bring a second pan and put it beside the first, and in doing so their hands touched.

"You'd better hold it there," said he, "while I shovel them across," and with his hollowed palms he scooped the beans from one to the other. In the pan he had shaken there now remained a little discoloured water, and at the bottom about a teacupful of gravel.

"There you are," said he triumphantly; "here's your gravel in this one, and there's your frijoles in that one. It's as easy as rolling off a log." She looked agreeably surprised, and he laughed.

"How would you look," said he, "if those little rocks were nuggets, eh? Coarse gold, heavy gold, eh?" He smiled a strange smile, and a strange light shone in his eyes. "Many a thousand pounds of gravel I've washed, looking for gold in the bottom of every one; but this is the first time I ever panned out beans to get gravel. Maybe some day I'll find that heavy gold yet, but God knows where."

He straightened himself up to his full height, leaving

on the ground the pan over which he had been stooping. His eyes ranged out across the courtyard through the open gateway to distant pine-clad peaks standing out against the intense blue of the sky.

Manuelita had likewise set down her pan, and was leaning her hand against the side of the doorway and her head against her hand.

"I hope you will find it," she said, with a glance from the depths of her liquid eyes. His eyes met hers and dwelt there for a moment.

"Thanks," he said; "your good wishes should bring good luck."

"I wish they might"; she half sighed as she spoke; "but which of us can ever tell where good fortune comes from?"

And then broke in the voice of Don Nepomuceno, "Come along and see the seed corn, Don Estevan. I have found the key."

CHAPTER VIII

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

THEY looked at the seed corn, and the American complimented Don Nepomuceno on his enterprise as an improving farmer.

"Why don't you take to the business yourself?" said the Mexican, as he relocked the door behind them. "You have money and you have a pair of good mules. You could buy land and work-oxen and hire peons. You would make your living at it easier than at the mining. How long have you been a miner?"

"Ten years, on and off," answered the other. "It is a good slice out of one's life, I admit"; there was a certain wistfulness in his tone. He was beginning to think that perhaps he had missed a good deal of happiness in his time.

"Ten years of wandering!" exclaimed the Mexican. "*Ay de mi*, but you must be tired. Why should you want to go back to Colorado and begin it all over again?"

"Well, for one thing," answered the other, "I've just heard from an old pard of mine up there, and I think from the way he talks he's got hold of a good thing. I'm going to see."

"And you'll go all that journey just to see!" said the other. "You trust him? You think he's a good *man*?"

" Well, I don't know so much about that," admitted Stephens. " Truth to tell, the last time I saw him we had considerable of a difference of opinion ; in fact we split, and we reckoned to stay split. You see, he busted me up as we call it, ruined me, that is ; only I had the luck to sort of pull myself round. But that happened two years ago ; all the same I don't say that I want him for a pard again, though he must have pretty well straightened himself out, the way he talks ; but still, you bet, I 'd like mighty well to shake hands with him, right now."

" And he ruined you ? " exclaimed the Mexican.

" Busted me wide open. Left me flat broke," said the American.

" How did it all happen ? " asked the other. " Tell us all about it ; we have heard some of your adventures, but not this. Come into the sitting-room here and let us have it."

" Well, if it won't bore you, you 're welcome," said Stephens, following his host and preparing to refill his pipe.

" Ah, you must smoke when you talk, I know," said Sanchez, " and you wish to smoke your own American tobacco, for you do not like the flavour of our New Mexican *punche* in your pipe. Ho, a light here, Pedrito ! quick, bring a live coal for the señor."

Pedrito, a small son of the peon, came running from the kitchen with a live coal in a piece of hoop iron, which he offered to Stephens, pulling off his cap and standing bareheaded before the honoured guest, with old-world courtesy. Manuelita knew very well what was up, and fixed herself down to listen just by the door, where she could hear every word. Stephens settled himself down comfortably on the divan, and began.

"I picked up with this partner, who has just written me this letter, Rockyfeller his name is, when I was up in Idaho. We took to each other kind of natural-like, and he and I pulled together as amiably as a span of old wheel-horses for a goodish bit. We were quite different sort of men, too, in ourselves; but somehow that seemed to make it all the easier for us to get along. We worked in the mines all that winter, and when spring came we had enough saved to rig out a real A1 prospecting outfit. Rocky—that's what I called him—used to spree a bit every once in a while, but nothing really to hurt, you know. He could pull up short, which is more than most men who go on the spree have sense to do. His sprees did n't prevent our saving over four hundred dollars. Then we bought two cayuses to ride—cayuses is the name they give to those broncho horses up that way,—and a good pack-mule and plenty of grub and blankets. We put in the whole of that summer prospecting off in the Cœur d'Alène country, and we staked out a lot of claims on different lodes, and we put in a good bit of work on some of 'em so as to hold 'em for the year. Well, come fall, we had n't been able to sell any one of our claims, and we had n't taken out any high-grade ore that would pay for packing over the mountains to any reduction works, and there we were, short of cash. So we cleared from that Cœur d'Alène country at last. It was too far from a railroad. We sold our claims for what we could get, and that was n't much, and we lit out for Montana, and there that next summer we just did everlastingly prospect over some of the roughest country I ever ran across. The Indians were powerful bad too, to say nothing of the road-agents. But we struck it at *last pretty rich* on a lode that we called 'The Last

Lap'—that 's the last round, you know, that the horses make on a race-track. I 'd spent eight mortal years chasing my tail all round the Pacific slope looking for a good lode, and here it was, after all, across on the head-waters of the Missouri in Montana. We knew we 'd got a good thing. The ledge was three to five feet thick, with a nice, uniform lot of high-grade ore, and a special streak that would assay up to five hundred dollars a ton. I never saw a nicer lode. The only thing was, it was a plaguy long way from any quartz mill for the free ore, and it was a plaguy sight farther to the only reduction works that could handle the richest portions of it. Of course what the mine wanted was a smelter of its own, right on the spot, but that 's what got us. We had n't the capital to start it. It wanted at least fifty or a hundred thousand dollars laid out before we could hope to get back a cent. That mine was worth a million, if we 'd had it in California, but off there, five or six hundred miles from a railroad, owned by us two prospectors who 'd just about got to the end of our tether, it was too big a thing for us to handle. Well, we did what work we could on it. We sunk a shaft and ran a bit of a drift, and we went into Helena and we offered a share in it to a few capitalists we thought we could trust. None of 'em would even look at it. At last we ran on to Colonel Starr,—old Beebee Starr; likely you never heard of him, but they knew him well enough up there,—and he rode out with us to see it ; and he tumbled to it, too, as soon as ever he 'd grubbed out a few specimens with his own pick and had 'em assayed. Well, he would n't take a half-interest and find the money to develop the mine, which was what we wanted him to do, and we were stony-broke by that time except for our cayuses and

our camp outfit, and winter a-coming on ; and the long and short of it was that we gave Colonel Starr a quit-claim deed to our whole interest in the Last Lap Lode for twelve thousand five hundred dollars in greenbacks, paid down on the nail. The Last Lap has paid more than that much in a month in dividends since then, but that's common enough ; that's how things do pan out ; but I don't believe in whining over my luck, never did. And I'd been waiting eight years for a look in, and I did n't despise getting my half of the twelve thousand five hundred dollars, if the Last Lap was worth a million.

"So we sold the best quartz mine in Montana, and that's where Rocky and I split. We got the money from Colonel Starr in greenbacks, and it was a roll as thick as my arm. And Rocky pouched it all, for I had to go out to a cabin three miles out of town to see another old pard of mine who had been crushed by a fall of rock and was dying. I know I ought never to have left Rocky with that money on him ; but what was I to do ? It was late in the day ; I had to go ; I could n't take it along with me, for a man was liable in those days to be held up anywhere round the outskirts of town by those cursed road-agents. Rocky had kept plumb straight for over a year. I trusted him, and I went. I got back to our hotel that night about ten o'clock, and a man says to me, 'D' you know where your pard Rocky's gone ?'

"'No,' says I, 'aint he here ?'

"'Not much,' says he ; 'he's at Frenchy's, bucking agi'n' the tiger.'

"My heart felt like a lump of ice. I just turned right around and walked across the road to where this *Frenchy* kept a faro bank, and went in. There was

Rocky, about half drunk, sitting at the table, with about three little chips on the cloth before him. I went up and put my hand on Rocky's shoulder and looked on. The dealer turned up the jack, I think it was, and raked in Rocky's stake. Rocky turns his head and looks up at me with a ghastly grin. 'Is that you?' says he; 'Jack, you'd orter hev come before. I've had a devil of a run of bad luck; I'm cleaned out.'

" 'In God's name,' says I, 'is that so?'

" 'You bet,' says he.

" 'I felt as if my eyes were two big burning holes in my head. 'God forgive you, Rocky,' says I, 'for playing the giddy goat, and me for leaving you alone for one night in Helena, Montana. Come on out of this now, Rocky, and I'll divide my share with you. I never went back on a pard.'

" 'Then the big blow came. 'Your share?' says he; 'why it's all gone. It's all gone, every dollar of it, and them chips you saw me lose was the end of the Last Lap Lode.' I heard some bumner behind me give a laugh, one of those whiskey-soaking galoots that think it funny to see the next man cleaned out.

" 'I felt a queer lump in my throat, and I says to the banker, very solemn, 'Mr. Frenchy, this gentleman here,' I was holding my hand on Rocky, 'he's my pardner, and I must beg you to take notice that half what you've won off him is my property that he had charge of.'

" 'That's no use, young man,' says the banker to me. 'We play for keeps in this house, and so you'll find it.'

" 'We'll see about that,' says I. 'Now, Rocky, tell me, is the whole of the Last Lap gone, the whole of the twelve thousand five hundred dollars?'

“ ‘ Every last cent,’ says Rocky. I could see by his looks that he felt powerful mean.

“ ‘ Then, mister,’ says I to the banker—I was determined to be deadly civil—‘ six thousand two hundred and fifty dollars of what you ’ve took from this gentleman belongs to me.’

“ ‘ You ’re interfering with the progress of the game,’ says he ; ‘ and say, look here, you don’t need to make that remark of yours here again. That ’s entirely a matter between you and your pard ; it ’s none of my business, but if you want any advice of me, it is that you take him outside and settle it with him.’

“ He had his gang around him, and I saw that they had the deadwood on me, and the other players wanted to go ahead with their game. I was a stranger from the mountains, dead-broke, with no backing, and I felt there was no show for me in that shebang. I did n’t open my mouth, but I set myself to get Rocky home, first thing. I had pretty near to drag him there. When I got him on the street the whiskey he ’d drunk went into his head, and he was like a madman. He wanted to fight me, actually he did, till I got his gun away from him. He hit me, yes, he struck me with his fist, till I had to pinion him ; luckily I was the stronger man of the two. I got him back to our room at last, and got him to bed. He just laid there on his bed like a log and snored. And I laid over there on mine and cursed. I lay awake all that night thinking. I ’d been a brother to Rocky ; I ’d saved him time and again before that night ; and now he ’d been and given me clean away,—lost me the only good stake I ’d ever had in eight years.

“ I was sick. I did n’t know what to do. We *had n’t even* money to pay our livery-stable and hotel

bill. We 'd put up at a first-class hotel when we made our bargain with Colonel Starr, reckoning to pay our account out of the proceeds of the Last Lap. Now, by selling our cayuses we 'd hardly cover it ; so that here we were, fairly busted, afoot, stony-broke, and winter coming on. Sick was no name for what I felt. It was all to begin over again, and I was eight years older than when I started out at prospecting. You bet I felt old that night. Morning came, and I could n't eat any breakfast. Rocky was snoring still. I belted on my six-shooter, stepped over to Frenchy's, and asked for the proprietor. They told me he was n't up. It was a tony gambling-house, you know, quite a 'way-up' sort of place. I sat down and said I could wait. At last they told me he 'd see me. I was shown up into a room. He was there, spick and span, in a biled shirt and diamond pin, and all that.

" 'Sit down,' says he.

" 'Thank you,' said I, 'I can stand. I prefer it.' There was a table between us.

" 'Let me warn you,' says he, 'at once, that this room is loopholed, and that you are now covered with a double-barrelled shot-gun, loaded with sixteen buck-shot in both barrels, at about ten feet off. If you make a move towards that six-shooter you 've brought you 'll be filled so full of lead that your hide would n't hold shucks.'

" 'All right,' said I, 'I expected as much. I did n't bring this six-shooter to argue with you.'

" He kind of laughed at that. 'Then what the h—l did you bring it here for?' says he.

" 'To protect myself on the street,' says I ; 'to protect myself from footpads as I go back to my hotel with my money.'

“ ‘What money’s that you’re talking about?’ says he.

“ ‘My money,’ says I, ‘that you’ve won off my pardner last night, six thousand two hundred and fifty dollars in greenbacks. That’ll need protecting.’

“ He gave a kind of a grin. ‘It’s protected by them thirty-two buckshot at the present moment,’ he says, ‘and I guess they’re good enough to guarantee it.’

“ ‘I’m not denying it,’ says I. ‘I’ve come here, as a gentleman, to appeal to you as a gentleman, to restore me my money that my pardner’s wrongly handed over to you.’

“ He looked amused. ‘I notice you don’t speak as if you upheld the game was n’t square,—as if he’d been robbed of it here,’ says he.

“ ‘I don’t know nothing at all about that,’ says I. ‘I don’t gamble myself, but I don’t doubt your game’s a square game enough, as things go. People say it is. I don’t complain of the game; that’s Rocky’s business, if it’s anybody’s. It’s my money that I’m talking about, whether it was a skin game that he lost it over or not. It’s those greenbacks that Colonel Starr paid me that I’m here for.’

“ Then he fairly laughed out. ‘Why, you galoot,’ says he, ‘you talk like a tenderfoot, yet you’ve been around this Western country long enough to cut your eye-teeth. When did you ever hear of a professional gambler giving up the stakes after he’d won ’em?’

“ ‘I don’t know as I ever did,’ says I; ‘but if not, here’s the place for it to begin to happen, right here and now. I tell you I’ve got to have that money. I tell you I’m tired. I’ve prospected in every range of *mountains* there is in three Territories to find that

Last Lap Lode. I 've been eight years sweating and starving and freezing and wrastling round. Yesterday, for the first time in my life, I got my stake, and I 've got to have it. I tell you again I 'm tired. I won't go through it all again for nothing. I 'm either going out of this room with my money in my pocket, or I 'm going out of it feet first, with a hole in my head you could put your fist through. I don't threaten nobody, but I 'll have my money or I 'll die right here.'

" ' You say you don't threaten,' says he suspiciously. 'Aint that what you 're saying now—something darned like a bluff?'

" ' No,' says I, ' it aint. I don't threaten,' and I turned my right hip round towards him where I had my pistol slung. ' I 'll hold up my hands and you can take away this pistol if you like,' and I threw up both my arms over my head.

" ' Put down your hands,' says he quietly, ' I don't want to take your pistol.' There were mirrors all round the room, and as I turned I caught sight of my face, and though I felt red-hot I could see I was as white as a sheet, and my eyes like coals of fire. Truth to tell, I was mad. ' Don't take things too hard,' says he, ' it 'll come right. I know just how you feel. I 've been busted myself more nor once. Look here, young man, I 've rather taken a liking to you. I 'm going to set you going again. I 'll give you a thousand dollars out of my own pocket, and that 'll start you, and all I 'll ask is——'

" ' You 'll give h—l !' I burst out. ' I 'm not a beggar ! I don't want no man's charity. I want my money—six thousand two hundred and fifty dollars in greenbacks—neither more nor less. That 's all.' "

Stephens paused. The vividness of his own recol-

lections, excited by the recital of the incident, had flushed his face and quickened his breathing. His pipe had gone out, and he signalled to the boy for another coal to relight it. Manuelita sprang up, ran to the kitchen hearth, snatched a coal from it, and gave it to the boy to carry in.

Don Nepomuceno, keenly interested, leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "Yes," he said, "yes. Gambling makes much trouble. I know it, for I was a great gambler myself. There were four years that I gambled a great deal, when I was sowing my wild oats." He nodded with the sententiousness of a reformed character, who yet relished the reminiscence. "It's a bad thing, very bad. But young men will be young men. Now, there's my son Andrés, he gambled a great deal too much last winter. But, look you, I am keeping that young man now out in camp with the sheep herd, to see after the peons. The lambing season is just coming on, and they are going off up the Valle Grande, where there is much green grass. That is far away from the settlements; he can't get into much trouble up there, can he?" and the father chuckled with self-satisfaction over his ingenious little manoeuvre. "But here, I am interrupting you, Don Estevan, and I want to hear the rest of your story. Please excuse me, and continue."

"Well," resumed Stephens, "the upshot of it was he saw I was in earnest. So I was. I expected to die right there. If he'd attempted to leave that room, I'd have jumped him, and then they'd have killed me. I did n't mind, I was so wound up. He turns to me, and says he, 'I believe I'm going to do a thing that I never did before, young man. I'm going to *give you back* that money that your partner lost of

yours.' He went to a safe he had in the corner, unlocks it, takes out a roll of notes and brings 'em to the table. 'Jake,' he sung out to his man through the wall, 'you can put away that shot-gun, it aint needed.'

"He counts out to me the full amount and hands it over.

"'Mr. Frenchy,' says I, 'you're a gentleman. I'll never forget this the longest day I live.'

"'No more 'll I,' says he, with a dry grin on his face. 'The laugh's on me this time, I think,' he says, 'and I can tell you that aint the case very often.'

"'I think likely,' says I, getting up to go. 'Good morning, mister; will you shake hands?'

"'That I will,' says he; and we shook.

"'Look here,' says he, holding me by the hand, 'I want to ask you one thing more. If you thought you had the best right to this money why did n't you go to a lawyer and enter suit for it?'

"'Go to a lawyer!' said I; 'what would I do that for? The law in Montana's a thief; you know it, and everyone knows it.' So it was, Don Nepomuceno. The head of the ladrones there was the regular, lawful, elected sheriff of Helena; the road-agents ran the country in fact.

"'No,' says I to Mr. Frenchy, 'I did n't want no lawyer. I heard say you were a gentleman, and I thought I'd give you a chance to prove it, and I'm glad I did.'"

Stephens took a few draws at his pipe; the excitement into which he had worked himself over his story was passing off now the climax was over.

"Well," he resumed, "I went back to my hotel and I woke Rocky. I told him we must part, and I offered to divide. He would n't quite do that, but he took a

thousand dollars off me. He was mighty penitent, but I told him I'd no use for such a pard any more. I was sick of Montana altogether, and concluded to skip. I paid my hotel bill, went over to Frenchy's and made him a present of my cayuse, and I donated over to him my share in every claim I had located in Montana to compensate him for what he had lost by giving up the half of Rocky's losings. I believe he's made a pot of money out of some of those claims since. I took the stage for Green River City, and then for Denver, and I got through safe without being held up. I salted down most of my money into Denver real estate, which pays me a fair interest, and part I've used in paying my way while I've been prospecting in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. And that's how I come to be here."

"Thank you, Don Estevan, thank you," said the Mexican. "It is most interesting; but I wonder you can think of going back to such a *compañero*. It is a very perilous idea."

"Oh, well," answered Stephens carelessly, as he rose to take his departure, "meeting him is n't the same thing as going and doubling up with him again. I'll be apt to know more about that when I see him."

But Manuelita's heart gave a little painful throb at the discovery that this man, in whom she was fast learning to take an interest too great for her own peace of mind, could return so lightly to a life that had already brought him into such dangers, and could depart apparently without thinking of her, or of what his loss might mean to her. He did indeed belong to another world.

His mule was brought out and saddled, and his belt *once more* buckled on, with the revolver hanging low

on his right hip. He warmly grasped Don Nepomuceno's hand at parting, and with a smile and a bow and his hat doffed to the ladies, he swung himself into the saddle and rode away.

Don Nepomuceno and his sister stood in the great doorway at the entrance to the courtyard, looking after his retreating form. He rode with the long stirrup and erect military seat of one who had seen service in a United States cavalry regiment, no bad school for horsemanship; his fine figure and his athletic frame showed off to great advantage. A hundred yards away, at the bend of the road, he turned in his saddle to wave his hat once more in a final adieu, and the warm sunlight kissed his profusion of golden curls. Manuelita ran back into the house that her aunt might not detect the emotion betrayed by her quivering lip. But the elder lady had her gaze steadily directed towards the parting guest. "*Ah, que hombres tan aventureros, si, son estos!*" she said—"What bold adventurers they are, those men!"

"True indeed," answered her brother, "'t is most true. For myself, I hate the Americans, most of them, but admire this one, and I like him too. But he is set on this life of adventure. I sounded him on the matter; I even hinted to him that it was full time for him to marry and settle down. But he would none of it."

"*Es hombre muy frio*"—"He is a very cold man"—said the Mexican woman, and there was a spice of scorn as well as regret in her tone. She despised a man who was a laggard in love, and her spoken judgment had coincided with Manuelita's thought.

"It is true, it is most true," assented her brother. "He is cold. These Americans are not impassioned

in the love of women as we are. The chill of their frozen North is in the very marrow of their bones. They are not like unto us of Mexico and the South."

Those who know them best will bear witness that, whether they are descended from Spanish *conquistadores*, from the devoted warriors of Montezuma, the passionate hearts of the sons and daughters of Mexico prove them in very truth to be Children of the Sun.

CHAPTER IX

A SQUAW FOR A FEE

ALL day Felipe remained in the wheat patch. At noon he ate his lunch of bread and dried flesh down by the river instead of going back to the pueblo. At intervals during the day he came to the edge of the bank in order to see that the mare and the remaining mule were all right, and not trying to get up the bank into the crops. He might have gone off to talk, for a change to other Indians, who were working in their fields, but he did not care to. His heart was too sore; he wanted to be alone. He thought and he thought, but all to no purpose. He ended by saying to himself, "Well, there 's one day more. I 'll see Josefa to-night, and we 'll talk it over."

A wild idea floated through his brain of taking one of Don Estevan's animals without his leave, but he knew it was wild. He believed Don Estevan would shoot anyone that did so, and he did not mean to incur that penalty. The only rational scheme he could think of was to run off in the night to the sierra, find the horse herd next day, get his father's horse and start back with it, but instead of coming straight to the pueblo, to lie hid in the foothills of the sierra till night time, and then slip down and get Josefa to come. But he knew that on the morrow, when his father missed

him, there would be a noise made and he might be followed, in which case his plan might miscarry, the more so that his disappearance would cause a doubly sharp watch to be kept on Josefa. With melancholy eyes he watched the sun sink lower and lower in the west. Precious time was passing, and he was doing nothing and could do nothing to bring his will to pass. He burned with desire to act, and he was helpless.

Before sunset he caught the mare and mule; and took them up to the pueblo in order to put them in the corral for the night. This was the time of day when Josefa was likely to be fetching water from the ditch, which had been empty all the morning on account of the blasting, and in the hope of meeting her Felipe led them through the street on which her father's house faced.

And where had Josefa been all this time? She had been hard at work at home, under the vigilant eye of her step-mother. Grinding corn meal was the labour which she was set to do, a good steady task to give to a young person of rebellious disposition. The Indian hand-mill is a large, smooth stone, something like a flagstone, set sloping in a box on the floor. The grinding is always done by a woman, who kneels on the ground, and bending over the mill rubs the corn up and down with a smaller stone held in both her hands. Hard work it is indeed for back and arms, but the Pueblo women keep it up for hours. Their good health and fine physique are largely due to this vigorous exercise.

Josefa worked away over the mill till her back ached, while her step-mother, at the other end of the room sat at a hand-loom, on which she was slowly weaving a *gorgeous blanket* of many colours for the cacique's

next official appearance. Josefa thought as she toiled at her work ; and her mind reviewed over and over again different alternatives. From the bottom of her heart she hoped that Felipe would be successful in getting a horse from the American. If he did n't, she did not know what she should do. One thing only was certain in her mind. Have Ignacio she would not. They might starve her, and they might beat her, but they should not force her to be his wife. What was the use of being a woman of Santiago if she might n't have some say in the matter ? Why should she be treated as a slave, as the savage Utes treated their women ? " I don't care," she said to herself, and as she said it she stiffened her back, and rubbed away at the refractory corn harder than ever. " I won't. He's old, and he 's ugly, and I hate him. I know he beat his first wife—he did. I won't have him."

She glowed with the heat of her scorn and indignation ; but all the time a little unbelieving spirit in the recesses of her mind kept asking in a sort of undertone, " How will you like being beaten if you disobey ? How will you like it ; how will you like it ? " And as she cooled off from her glow, and thought of another side to the picture,—an intercepted flight, rough seizure, angry words, and furious blows,—she quaked. She had not been beaten since she was a child, and not much then, for the Pueblo Indians are good to their little ones ; but she knew that her father was within his rights in giving her to whom he chose, and that those who broke the laws of the community were liable to the lash. She had never seen it done severely. All she had seen was two or three cuts with a whip, administered publicly in the street after a severe scolding by the marshal of the village, to some misdemeanor.

who had let his ass trespass among the standing corn, or who had otherwise broken some of their simple rules; but she knew with what severity, in private, serious offences were treated, and in the depths of her brave little heart she quaked.

But the quaking fit passed off, too, as the indignant glow had done; perhaps the hard work helped her through. "They can't do more than kill me," said she to herself. "I can stand it. But have old Ignacio I won't."

Then she thought of Felipe. She had not much fear for him. His own father certainly would n't beat him. For one thing he could n't, for the son was the stronger; and as for Ignacio, she fairly laughed to herself at the idea of the ugly old fellow attacking Felipe. "Why, Felipe would put him on the ground in a moment, and keep him there, too, as long as he wanted," she thought, and felt a grim satisfaction at the idea. The only danger she feared for him was lest he should get furious and use his knife, and kill Ignacio, and be hanged for it. But Felipe had promised her never, never to do such a thing, and he would keep his word. Such a thing had not happened in the pueblo for forty years—not since old Fernando was a youth, when he had quarrelled in a fit of jealousy with another Indian and stabbed him, and had been arrested, and afterwards pardoned.

Towards evening it was reported that the ditch was running again, and Josefa and her step-sisters went out to draw water. With the great earthen jars on their heads, they filled out one after another, and marched off to the waterside. Here they lowered their burdens to the ground, and slowly filled them by dipping up *cupfuls of water* with their gourds. There were several

other women at the waterside doing the same thing, and there was much animated talk about the blasting of the acequia—for they had heard the explosions quite distinctly at the village—and about the improvement of the ditch, which was fuller now than it had ever been before.

Then some of the younger girls took to playing and splashing each other, and one said something sly to Josefa about Ignacio. She flushed up and was on the point of flying into a rage, but calmed herself in a moment, returned a laughing retort, and joined in the fun and the splashing. Her step-sisters were surprised, for they well knew her feelings on the subject of the intended marriage; but they supposed that perhaps she was growing more reconciled to the idea of it.

At last the welcome interval of fun and gossip came to an end. One by one the jars, now full and very heavy, were carefully elevated on the heads of their owners, the party broke up, and the women returned to their respective homes. Josefa was hoping for the appearance of the figure she desired to see, and lingered as long as possible; but when the rest of the party had assumed their burdens she could delay no longer, and, taking up hers, moved after them, the last of the file.

As they re-entered the village she saw with joy that her manœuvre had succeeded. Felipe was strolling very slowly, and apparently quite unconcerned, up the street, leading the mare and mule towards the corrals.

They dared not speak, but they had devised a little code of signals of their own. A shake of the head conveyed to her, "I have failed"; a crook of the forefinger, "I am coming to-night." An answering crook

from her said to him, "I will meet you"; and they passed on their ways, no one but themselves the wiser for the little exchange of messages that had taken place. But Josefa's heart sank lower still as she crossed the threshold and thought that one of the precious three days was already gone, and no means of escape was yet provided.

At sunset her father returned. The acequia round the point had been properly embanked on its lower side, and the stone dislodged by the blasts cleaned out of its channel. He was in high good humour at the success of the work, which would render memorable his term of office. He brought his saddle indoors, and, taking down a key from a sort of shelf of wickerwork, which was slung by cords from the roof beams, he took his horse to the stable. He did not keep him at the corrals, where the prospector kept his mare and mules, but was the proud possessor of a mud-built stable, with a lock on the door.

His coming set Josefa thinking again. "Our great difficulty," said she to herself, "is a horse. Why not take my father's? If I could only get the key we could manage it. I could not indeed get down the saddle and take it out of the house without making a noise, but Felipe must find a saddle. And if I can get the key and we take my father's horse, he will have nothing to pursue us on, which is double reason for taking it."

Filled with this idea, she got some more corn and began to grind again, so that when her step-mother went into the kitchen to prepare the evening meal she was left alone in the outer room. Her father came back from the stable and replaced the key on the shelf, *and then went out again without speaking to her.*

Now was her chance. She darted silently across the room, seized the key, and flew back to her work so quickly that no one in the next room could have suspected what she had done.

She was so bright and cheerful that evening that her family thought she must have ceased her opposition and become reconciled to the match. "Ah," said her step-mother, "if Ignacio only gives you work enough, and does n't spoil you, he 'll have a docile wife as any in the pueblo."

Josefa laughed aloud. "He will have a docile one when he gets me!" she said. But she laughed to think how blank they would look at daybreak next morning when they found her flown.

After supper the cacique and the chiefs went in a body to call upon Stephens. They entered the room and seated themselves against the wall on the ground, sitting on sheepskins or on mats which they had brought with them. Stephens passed round the tobacco-bag and some corn husks cut square for cigarette papers. Presently old Tostado began to speak.

"We are very grateful, and we give you thanks, Sooshiuamo," said he, "for the work that you have done for us to-day. Ever since the year of the great eclipse of the sun, which is the most ancient thing the oldest man of us can remember, the point of rocks has been that which has given trouble to us all, and our fathers told us it was so when they were little boys. We have had to be always mending it, and then just when we had most need of water it always broke. Then you came among us to stay. You know that we like to live apart from the rest of the world. We do not like to have strangers come here to live. Our fathers never allowed it, and they have handed down

to us as sacred the command that we should never allow it either. We have obeyed their command until now, and never till this day have we proposed to make an exception to our rule in favour of anybody. The Mexicans, and others who wish, may live at San Remo, and they may live at Rio Feliz, and at other places in the world, where they belong, but here, No. It is not our custom. We do not want it, and we have the right to prevent it. When our fathers made peace with the old kings of Spain, many generations ago, they had the right given them for ever to keep all strangers away. It is written in our grant, and it is a very good law to have. See how in Abiquiu the Indians let the Mexicans come in, and now they are a sort of mixed people, and not proper Indians at all. But we are the Indians of Santiago, and we wish to remain the same. But you came among us, and we gave you a name, and you lived quietly and did not interfere with anyone, and we saw that you were good. Then we gave you leave to stop on and to go and hunt in the mountain the wild cattle, which are the children of the cattle of the Indians. And you stayed with us all this winter past, and you have been happy here among us ; but now you say that you must go far away again, following your business. Now we say this : you have done a thing to-day that we are glad of, and our children will be glad of, and their children, too, for ever. Now we say this : you live alone, and life alone is very lonesome. It is good that you should give up the life of wandering so far and being so lonesome. It is good that you should live here with us, and we will build you a house, and we will give you a wife, a young one and a good one, whichever one you please among the *girls*, and we will assign you pieces of land of the vil-

lage, and you shall have it to cultivate the same as we do. If you do not want to work with the plough and the hoe yourself, you have money and you can hire others to work. And you shall live here safe and at ease, and if we want to do more to the ditch, or to keep the smallpox away, you shall do it, because you are wise and know the arts of the Americans. We have talked it over, and that is what we think." And he closed his oration and folded his blanket about him, not without dignity.

Stephens was sitting on the side of his bed, leaning forward and looking down, with his pipe in his mouth, when Tostado began his speech. As it proceeded, he stopped smoking, and still sat looking thoughtfully on the ground, holding his pipe in his hand, and a curious smile came over his features.

"People seem determined to make a squawman out of me somehow," he meditated. "First a lying stage-driver goes and swears to Sam Argles that I'm one already, and now here comes this worthy Tostado with an extremely public offer of the pick of the bunch. Well, how am I going to decline? Shall I say, 'Thanks very much, my good friend, but I'm not taking any, this time'? Pretend to blush and be embarrassed, and play the funny man generally? Not much, I guess. My jokes with these people don't seem to come off. They're not their style. No, I'll just refuse civilly; but, seeing that they're making themselves so particularly sweet to me at this moment, I believe I'll trot out my best card and ask for the mine."

He waited till the applause that followed Tostado's peroration had quite died away, but instead of rising to make a formal speech in reply, he remained sitting on the side of the bed.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Tostado," he began conversationally, looking at the friendly face of the Turquoise headman, "and to all of you chiefs here present,"—he cast a comprehensive glance round the circle,—“for the good opinion you say you have of me, and for your proposal that I should settle down among you. I take it very kind of you that you offer me a wife and a home here. But I'm not quite prepared to settle at present. You said, Tostado, that I had money; so I have, but only a little, not enough, not as much as I want. Now, I've got this to say to you. There's just one thing that would induce me to remain here, and not go away. Don't be startled, it's a very simple matter; you know that I'm a miner, and live by finding and working mines. Well, I want you to give me leave to open and work your silver mine, the silver mine that you have up in the mountains, and that you keep so carefully hidden. If you'll make a contract with me to do that, I'll stay on here and work the mine for you. What do you say?"

Never was the admirable facial self-control of the red man better exemplified than in the reception of this speech. To the Indians the very name of mines in connection with themselves was a horror. They had awful traditions of ancient Spanish cruelties, of whole villages stripped of their young men, who were forcibly carried off to work in a slavery which was degradation and death. Spanish enterprise in that line had ceased with the exhaustion of the labour supply, and the accumulation of water in the shafts which they had no steam-pumps to remove. But the terror of those evil days lay upon the souls of the red men. They had hidden those ancient shafts where their forefathers laboured *in the damp, unwholesome darkness, till sickness and*

misery found their only respite in death. They guarded the secret of them jealously, and never with their goodwill should they be reopened.

At the words of the American, the chiefs turned one to another with looks of astonishment, and acted their little play admirably.

Tostado remained silent, and the cacique was the first to speak.

"Silver mine?" he innocently asked. "What silver mine?" thus ignoring the fact that the prospector had broached the idea to him already. "*We* have no silver mine. *We* know nothing of such things. The Mexicans have some, far away in the south. The Americans have some, far away there," he pointed to the north. "But there never have been any here, never. Is it not true, my brothers?" He appealed to the circle of chiefs. There was a chorus of replies: "It is true." "There never have been any." "None of us ever heard of such things here."

"Nonsense, Salvador," retorted Stephens, laughing as good-humouredly as he could by way of reassuring the suspicious redskins. "Everybody round here knows that you fellows have a mine that you keep well covered up so that nobody shall find it. Very sensible plan that of yours, too. Quite right not to let other people get hold of it. I allow that. But you're all wrong about one thing. You're afraid the Spaniards may come back and force you to work in the mine again. No fear. The Spaniards have gone for keeps, and the American Government has come, and it's going to stop. There's absolutely nothing to be afraid of. I've heard of your mine; now, you let me work it for you; I'll make money out of it for myself and money for you. The money will buy you lots of cows and sheep

and horses, and improved ploughs and good guns, and all sorts of things. You say you have got confidence in me, here 's your chance to show it."

He might as well have expended his eloquence upon the dead adobe walls. The chiefs stared at him vacantly. When Stephens ceased there was a pause, and then Tostado took up the subject.

"It is quite true what you say, Sooshiuamo. You are our friend. The American Government is our friend ; it has protected us from the Mexicans when they tried to ride roughshod over us, and we are grateful to the American Government. But the stories about a silver mine are foolishness. These Mexicans must have been yarning to you ; they are idle talkers. We have no mine. We never had a mine. We don't know anything about mines, and never did." And again all the chiefs chorused :

"We know nothing of a mine ; nothing whatever."

For a whole hour Stephens argued with them. Vain effort. No solid rock was ever more impenetrable than an Indian who has made up his mind, and the baffled and wearied prospector gave it up in despair.

His thoughts drifted away to earlier days when he first found himself in the midst of that wonderful rush to the El Dorado of this century, the Far Western gold-fields. He thought of his hopes, his failures, and his struggles ; how he had always intended "when he had made his pile," to go back East and marry a nice girl of his own race, and settle down comfortably. When he had made his pile !—the will-o'-the-wisp that has led many a man such a weary dance through the sloughs of life. He had to admit to himself that he had lowered his figure. He had set it at first at a million, a brown-stone front, and a seat in the United States Senate. It

had come down step by step in the last ten years, till it stood now at ten thousand dollars,—enough to buy a nice little place back East, and stock it, and have something left on hand ; but, alas ! he was not half-way yet even to that goal—and now there was offered him a mud home, an Indian squaw, and a corn patch. “ Not yet, I reckon,” said he to himself, with a grimmer smile than ever. “ I ’ve not come to that quite yet. Not but what these Indians are the honestest and most virtuous folks to live among that ever I knew. But I can’t quite go turning squawman yet.”

“ Much obliged to you, Tostado,” said he in response to a renewed offer, “ but I don’t want to settle down just now. No, thank you. I have business to see after far away, beyond the country of the Navajos. Not that I don’t like you here. I consider you as my friends. You know that. Perhaps some other day I may think about settling down, but now I have other business. But I am much obliged to you, all the same.”

“ No,” said the Indian ; “ it is we who are obliged to you for what you have done for us. It is a great thing, and we are grateful to you for it. There is nothing we would not do for you.” And then he went on to praise and compliment Stephens, and the Americans generally ; for he was no mean proficient in the art of oratory, and enjoyed doing what he knew he could do well, and what his people admired him for.

Poor Stephens could not escape from the flow of language by quietly walking off, as he had done in the morning ; and though he wanted badly to get free to finish reading his San Francisco weekly paper, he could not be so discourteous as to cut the speech short.

abruptly. But all things come to an end at last, and finally the chiefs, having made speeches to their heart's content, took their leave, folded their blankets around them, and filed off into the moonlight.

CHAPTER X

AN ELOPEMENT

ONCE again Felipe waited patiently for the setting of the moon, in the dark corner between the mud oven and the wall where we saw him first. Thoughts keen almost as sensations chased each other through his mind as he crouched there watching. Dominant was the feeling of the eternal sense of need : " I want her and I 'll have her." All this trouble, and strife, and disappointment only made him more obstinate. " I will succeed," he said to himself. " I will. If I fail now I shall be a loser all my life—always wanting, never getting. If I win I shall have what I desire all my life and be happy." This was frank egoism. Felipe's moral standpoint may be guessed from the fact that had he been told he was egoistic he would not have understood the implied reproach. To himself his position was simply natural.

But it would be wrong to suppose that generous and unselfish impulses did not run side by side with self-regarding ones. He thought of Josefa, lonely and sad in her father's house. His anger rose as he thought of the unkindness and the threats she had to endure, and of the heartless way in which she was being disposed of. He longed to save her from the present trouble and from the hateful future that threatened

her. How sweet she was and how beautiful! Every fibre in his frame thrilled at the thought of becoming her protector, at the delicious idea of her seeking safety in his arms, while he acted as her shield against tyranny and wrong. And through her sweet eyes there looked out, he knew, the faithful soul of a true and loving woman. She was good. He felt as sure of that as he did of his own existence. Her kindness and dutiful spirit he knew, for he had seen her behaviour in the daily life of the village. What a shame it was that she should be so ill-treated just because she was by nature gentle and obedient! Poor girl, she would want to be comforted a great deal to make up for all the trials she was undergoing now. He would have to be very good to her in every way, and he swore to himself that he would be so; he would do his best to make her happy. Ah, if they could but once get to the padre at Ensenada and be married by him, it would be all right; and at the thought his pulse beat high.

At last the welcome hand appeared at the hole in the wall he had been watching so long, and he flew to the spot.

"Is that you, sweetheart?" he whispered as he stretched his hand along the wall to meet the little fingers. "I always tell myself you will not come, just to tease myself, for I know all the time that you will. And at last I see the signal and I know it is all right."

"You know I always do come," she returned, "you bad boy, as soon as I feel sure they are sound asleep. But now tell me what news you have."

"Bad enough," said he despondently. "I asked the American—I begged hard of him; but he would not lend me one of his beasts. I waited till he was in a *good temper*, after he had blasted the rock; but it was

no use. I will go to-morrow to the sierra for my father's horse and I will come back for you in the night. He is thin and cannot travel fast, so you must come early before the moon sets or we shall not have time enough ; but we must take our chance as we can get it. I will tie him away off on the edge of the mesa, so that there will be no horse tracks for them to follow close here. You must come afoot so far."

"Stay, Felipe," said she. "I have been thinking. Can you get a saddle—now—to-night?"

"I can get one of the American's," he said. "He has an old one he never uses. He would lend me that, I know."

"Yes, but can you go to him to-night, Felipe?"

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I would wake him—he does n't mind what I do. But what horse are you thinking of? One of his?"

"No, no," she cried; "I have a better plan than that. We must take my father's horse. I got the key this evening after he went out. Go first and get the saddle, and then here is the key."

His fingers tightened eagerly on hers. "You darling!" he whispered. "How clever you are! Ten times cleverer than I. Why did n't I ever think of that before? Wait. I'll be back in a moment." He gave her hand one more rapturous pressure, and loosing it, darted off like the wind to Stephens's house.

Stephens was a sound sleeper, but in the middle of the night he was waked by a sudden angry growl from Faro. He opened his eyes, but it was pitch-dark. A low knock was heard at the door. "Who is it?" he cried, first in English, then in Spanish.

A voice answered, likewise in Spanish. "Oh, Don Estevan, it's me, Felipe."

"Felipe!" he exclaimed. "Why, what the mischief are you up to now? But come in, the door is n't locked."

He heard the latch pulled, and seized the collar of Faro, who was snarling savagely. The door opened and the cool night air blew freshly in. A figure was dimly seen in the starlight. Felipe approached the bed. "Oh, Don Estevan!" he began at once, "do be kind to me; lend me your saddle—the old saddle, not the good one. You know the old one hanging on the wall in there."

"Why, what's up, Felipe?" said Stephens, surprised at being roused by this request in the middle of the night. "What do you want with it? What makes you come bothering me now?"

"Oh, please don't be angry, but lend it me," pleaded the boy. "I will bring it you back, and I know you don't want it; you never use it."

"What mischief are you after?" said Stephens. "You want to go off sweethearting somewhere—that's what it is, you young rascal. That's what you wanted my mare for to-day. I know what you are up to."

"Oh, Don Estevan," begged the boy,—"the saddle, please. If you won't lend it to me, sell it to me. I have money,—five dollars."

"Hold on till I strike a light, and shut the door, will you?" said Stephens. "Lie down, Faro, and be quiet." The prospector got out of bed, struck a match, and lit a candle. "You're a pretty sort of fellow, to come roaming around this time of night!" he went on as, candle in hand, he stepped cautiously across the floor in his bare feet to the door of the inner room, which he unlocked. "Sensible people are in bed and asleep at this time of night," he grumbled. "*Come in here and get your saddle.*"

Felipe followed him instantly to the storeroom where he kept his powder-keg, mining-tools, pack-saddles, and provisions.

"There it is," said Stephens, pointing to an old saddle hanging by one stirrup from a peg in the wall. "Get it down. And the bridle ; yes, that 's it"—and the pair emerged again into the outer room.

Stephens locked the door again, and turning round encountered Felipe's hand with a five-dollar bill in it. "Here it is, Don Estevan ; five dollars," said the young Indian.

"Tut, tut, I don't want your money," said the American cheerfully. "Keep it or give to your sweetheart to keep for you. She 'll do that fast enough"—and he chuckled at his own wit. "Now don't you smash that saddle," he continued ; "and mind you bring it back when you 've done with it."

"Oh, thank you, Don Estevan, a thousand times !" cried the young Indian. "God will reward you for it."

"Likely story," growled his employer, "when I guess it 's the devil's business you 're riding on. There, that 'll do ; be off with you," he added ; and he escorted Felipe, still protesting his gratitude, to the door.

As the boy stepped outside, Stephens asked through the half-shut door, "Who 's going to look after my stock to-morrow ?"

"Oh, Don Estevan, my brother, my little brother Tomas. He will see to them. I have told him."

"Much good he 'll be !" retorted the Californian. "Whom did I hire, him or you ?"

"Why, me, Don Estevan, but my little brother will——"

"Yes, your little brother will play the mischief," said Stephens, cutting him short. "I know you."

There, get along with you. I 'm tired of you,"—and the sarcastic prospector turned growling to his blankets again. "Who is she? for there 's some woman at the bottom of it, as sure as fate," said he to himself as he turned over on his bed before going to sleep. "One of the young squaws I suppose. Felipe used to be a pretty good sort of a boy, but durn my skin if I don't believe he 's going to turn out just as ornery as the rest of 'em. Who is she, I wonder, anyway?" He was just dropping off to sleep when the thought struck him, "Maybe he 's gone to the corral to get the mare!" He half rose at the idea, but lay down again, soliloquising slowly, "No, he never would have come here to borrow the saddle if that had been his game; he dursn't. I 'd break every bone in his confounded young carcass if he dared do such a thing"; and comforting himself with this hypothetical revenge, he finally dropped asleep.

With the saddle safely tucked into the fold of his blanket, Felipe flew round the corner and down the street to the back of the cacique's house. When he came to the place he stooped down and picking up a tiny pebble he tossed it through the hole. Josefa was waiting inside and answered his signal instantly.

"Have you got the saddle?" she whispered.

"Yes, yes, all right," answered her lover.

"Here is the key," said she rapidly; "take this and go to my father's stable and get out the horse and take him away outside the pueblo and tie him, and then come back for me. I must n't risk being caught getting out unless we are quite sure to succeed; it would prevent our ever having another chance."

"Good!" said Felipe shortly; and without a *moment's delay* he started off.

"Stop, Felipe, stop an instant," she whispered. "Don't tie him near the corrals; he'll neigh to Don Estevan's animals."

"As if I did n't know that!" returned the boy almost indignantly, and he turned again and darted away. It was all plain sailing now. How clever of Josefa! How thoughtful she was!

He reached the cacique's stable, looked stealthily round to be sure he was not watched, and then turned the key in the lock and entered. The horse, a noble and intelligent creature, was standing there quietly. In a minute Felipe put the saddle on him and brought him out, locking the door again behind him. He led him straight away from the pueblo, up along the acequia; a few dogs began to bark at the unwonted sound of hoofs in the night. He tied him to a tree in a peach orchard, and gave him a handful of corn fodder which he had brought from the stable to keep him quiet. Then he flew back to the village.

"All right, Josefa, come! I have him tied ready," he whispered.

The little hand met his once again through the hole in the wall, and he pressed it. It trembled in his clasp. "You will always be good to me, always?" she said. "I shall have nobody but you now."

"Yes, I swear it, my heart's joy, I swear it!" he cried earnestly. "But come, come quick!" The clasped hands unlocked, and the Indian boy sank down once more to wait; this was to be the end of his waiting.

It was not for long. Three minutes later, a head peeped over the edge of the terrace above him, and in a moment more Josefa dropped into her lover's arms. One long kiss, one long, rapturous embrace, was all

they dared delay for ; and then without a word, hand in hand and side by side, they fled with stealthy steps up the street.

Perhaps it was the fact of a woman's being abroad at that hour of the night that excited the suspicions of the dogs ; but whatever it was, the whole hundred-and-odd of them belonging to the pueblo seemed to begin to bark just then. The clamour brought one or two Indians to their doors, but they saw nothing ; the lovers had already disappeared.

Up along the acequia they ran. They reached the peach orchard. The horse was there all right. Felipe bridled him in a moment and then sprang across the acequia with the lariat in his hand. He pulled at the rope, but the horse refused to follow. " Hit him, Josefa," said he to the girl, " hit him." She shook the fold of her blanket at the animal, and with a snort he sprang across after Felipe. She bounded over lightly and stood beside him.

He lifted her to the saddle and vaulted on to the croup behind her. He slipped his arms round her waist, both to hold her securely and to grasp the reins, and striking the horse's sides with his feet, he urged him forward. The noble creature made nothing of his double burden, and bounded forward.

" It 's no use trying to dodge," said he as he guided the animal straight towards the trail that led to the Rio Grande. " They 'll track us anywhere to-morrow ; but they can't see to trail before daylight, and by that time we must be at Ensenada."

" Hark to those dogs," said she, as the chorus of barkings from the village rose and fell upon the night wind.

" *Never mind ; we 're off now,*" said he, holding her

closer to him. "The dogs are always barking anyhow. They'll think it's only some Mexican going down the valley. Why, if they did wake up and miss us now, they must wait till morning to know which way we've gone, so don't you be frightened, sweetheart."

They struck into the trail at last—a well-marked bridle-path, which led across the mesas. There was no fear of their missing it, dark as it was after the moon had set, for both the horse and his rider knew the trail well enough. On they pushed, on, on, the keen night wind from the east blowing freshly in their faces, and causing them to fold their blankets more closely to them. The stout little Indian horse was used to carrying double, as indeed most horses in those parts are, and he travelled onward without flinching or staggering under his burden, cantering where the ground was not too rough, and picking his way with wonderful sure-footedness up and down the steep sides of the ravines, which here and there intersected the broad table-lands.

Felipe had to tell Josefa of his vain attempts to borrow the mare of the American, and he gave her a laughing description of the way in which he had roused him at midnight to borrow the saddle. "I'm glad, though, he did n't take the five dollars from me," said the boy. "Perhaps I should not have had money enough left for the padre if he had."

"But you have enough?" inquired Josefa eagerly. "How much have you?"

"Oh, I have fifteen dollars," replied he. "I have saved my wages, every cent, since Don Estevan came here last autumn, and my father let me keep half. Fifteen dollars is more than enough. It is only the

rich people who pay twenty and twenty-five dollars. Why, lots of poor people pay only ten. I am sure we are poor enough."

"I am afraid we are indeed," sighed she sadly.

"Never mind," said he cheerfully, trying to keep up her spirits, which were failing somewhat at the strangeness of this lonely ride over lands unknown to her, under the immense vault of night. "Never mind that. Why, I have sown six bushels of wheat more than last year, and I am going to put in plenty of corn too. There is plenty of land, and if we have not enough the head Turquoises must give us some more. There is lots of water now in the ditch to sow a thousand bushels more than we used to."

"Yes," said Josefa thoughtfully. "I know how hard you have worked, dear Felipe, and that you will not be slack now, but are you quite sure of your father? Will he not turn us out?"

"How can he?" said the boy scornfully. "You know he is too poor to hire anyone to work for him. He cannot do without me. He is getting old and cannot put in a crop by himself, and Tomas is too young to be much good. It is I who do the work on the land. You know, Josefa, I would work ten times harder for you," and he pressed her closer to him again.

"Yes, yes, Felipe," she cried, "I know that. I am sure of that. I never could have trusted you so if I had not known you were good at home. But, Felipe dear, if they are cross to me at your house I shall hate it."

"They sha'n't be cross to you," he cried hotly. "I am a man now, and they must listen to me. If I support them they must do what I say—at least sometimes," he added, correcting himself. "Besides, my *mother loves me*, and when she sees how I love you,

and how you are all the world to me, she will love you too ; I know she will."

" Ah, perhaps not, Felipe," said the girl doubtfully. " You talk like a man. Women are not always like that, you know."

" But she will ; she must," said Felipe decidedly. He had a comfortable masculine conviction that women's feelings were something that could always be put down or got round. He felt that he was acting a man's part now, and that it was time for him to assert himself. How could he feel otherwise with his arms round his sweetheart's waist, with the free sky above them and the broad mesas around, fifteen dollars in his pocket to pay the padre, and a good horse (he did not stop to think whose) to carry them to Ensenada! For the first time in his life he felt himself a man and free. They had left behind them the village with its narrow, cramping laws and customs, its parental tyrannies, and its hateful distinction of rich and poor. To Felipe, Ignacio with thirty cows was an odious monopolist. How delightful it was to have hoodwinked the watchful guardian of Josefa and baffled his miserly rival!

While the fugitives thus sped onward through the night, peace once more reigned supreme over the pueblo. The barking of the dogs at their departure had soon ceased, and no one took the trouble to inquire seriously into the source of their wrath. They might have been barking at a hungry coyote, come to explore the heaps of household refuse deposited day by day outside the village by the tidy squaws, or at some belated Mexican passing up or down the valley, or even at some stray donkey escaped from his owner's corral. At any rate, no one cared enough to prosecute his in-

quiries, and no movement was perceptible in the village till the first grey dawn.

Dawn caught the lovers descending the long hill that leads from the mesas down to the wide flats of the Rio Grande valley. The light was too dim as yet to do more than show vaguely the broad line of the wooded banks of the river, still some distance ahead of them. The sun rose as they were pushing across the sandy flats and passing through the poverty-stricken hovels of the Mexican village of La Boca, past a surprised-looking, unkempt peon, who blinked drowsily at the couple from his doorway. On they pressed and still onward, making for the point where the road forded the river.

But what roar was this that met their ears as they neared the grove of cottonwood trees through which the road to the ford ran,—a dull strong roar as of the rushing of many waters? Felipe recognised it, and on the instant his heart felt like lead in his breast.

“*Valgame Dios*, Josefa!” said he, “I believe the river is up. Oh! what luck! what luck!”

CHAPTER XI

MY DUCATS AND MY DAUGHTER

THE grey dawn that awoke the household of the cacique did so to some purpose. "Josefa," called the step-mother as she arose, "Josefa"—but no answer came. "Why, where can she be?" exclaimed the Indian woman, looking round and calling her other daughters. Salvador himself rushed into the inner room to look for her. In a moment he sprang out again.

"She has gone!" he shouted. "She has got through the trap-door and escaped. Oh, the wretch!"

"Where can she be?" wondered his wife helplessly.

"Where can she be?" he echoed scornfully. "Why, with that pauper scoundrel of a Felipe. I know her. Oh, I'll make her pay for this!"

He seized his revolver and slipped his belt through the loop of its case, and grasping a horsewhip he darted from the house. The rest of the family followed him somewhat timidly, anxious to see what was going to happen, wishing, perhaps, that he would punish her a little for not being so good and steady as they were, hoping, too, to intervene and save her from the extremity of his passion, for they knew how pitiless he was when roused.

The cacique flew straight to Atanacio's dwelling, and

thrusting the door open burst rudely into the apartment.

"Where is Felipe? Where is my daughter?" shouted he in tones of fury.

"I don't know. I don't know anything about it," said the old man humbly. "Is n't your daughter at home? Perhaps she is over at Sahwaquiu's." Sahwaquiu was Josefa's uncle, her own mother's brother, and Josefa was a pet of his.

"Where's Felipe, I ask you? Answer me, you old reprobate!" roared the angry cacique.

"I don't know," said the old man again, in the humblest tones. "I have not seen him. He was here last night when we lay down, but he got up and went out. I don't know where he is."

"He's run off with my daughter, that's where he is," shouted the indignant parent; "and I believe you know about it too," he added, threatening the old man with his whip. "You had better say what you know, or I'll make you."

He was a thick-set, muscular man, and looked well able to carry out his threat, as he stood over old Atanacio, who remained passive, seated on a sheep skin near the hearth, neither attempting to defend himself nor to escape. The cacique's black eyes flashed fury, and his coarse features worked with passion, as with taunts and threats he cowed the helpless being before him.

But meanwhile the news of the elopement had spread, and the Indians were buzzing about their village like a swarm of bees round the hive. Up dashed one of the younger men with news. "Cacique, Cacique," he cried, "the stable! Your horse has gone, but the stable is locked. His tracks go all up by the acequia"; and *he pointed to where two Indians, with their heads bent*

low almost to the ground, were busily questing from side to side like sleuth-hounds on a scent.

"Oh, the villain!" roared Salvador. "He's got my horse. He shall be hanged." And he ran first of all to the stable to satisfy himself by seeing with his own eyes what had happened.

It was true. The stable was locked, but the steed was stolen, as could be seen by lying down and peeping under the door. The cacique got up with his white shirt and buckskins all dusty from the ground, and turning to the crowd called out:

"Here, get me a horse, some of you—Tito, Miguel, Alejandro. Go get me the mare of the Americano, and mount yourselves, too." And he himself started out towards the acequia to look at the tracks. Several Indians ran towards the corrals.

"The saddle," said one; "we want a saddle; go get yours, Alejandro. You live nearest."

"Had n't we better tell the Americano," said Tito, "before we take his mare? Maybe he won't like to lend her."

"But he must lend her," retorted Miguel impatiently. "The cacique wants her. Is n't that enough?"

By this time they had arrived at the bars of the corral where the prospector kept his stock, and they stopped to wait for Alejandro to bring the saddle. Tito took advantage of the delay to act on his own motion, and darting over to the door of Stephens's dwelling began to knock vigorously.

"Hullo! who's there?" called out Stephens in response to the knocking. He was still between the blankets, and had not yet turned out.

"The cacique wants your mare," cried Tito through the keyhole.

"Wants my what?" exclaimed Stephens, who failed to catch his words exactly. "Open the door, can't you, and let me hear what you've got to say," he added, sitting up in bed.

Tito held the door ajar and put half his face into the aperture. He had a wholesome respect for Faro and did not care to adventure farther.

"The cacique wants to take your mare to ride, to go after his daughter," he explained.

"Well, he can't have her, that's all about it," said Stephens, getting out of bed and beginning to put on his moccasins. He had adopted the Indian foot-covering as more comfortable as well as more economical than boots. "Just tell him," he continued, "that I'm not lending horses just now. When I am I'll let him know. But why can't he take his own?"

"He has n't got it. It's gone," said Tito, at the same time signalling with the half of him outside the doorway to Miguel not to take the mare. "It's gone. Felipe's run away with the cacique's horse and his daughter."

"The dickens he has!" said Stephens. "When did he do that?" As he spoke he recollected Felipe's midnight visit to him for the purpose of borrowing the saddle, and a light dawned on him. But under the circumstances it seemed better to say nothing about the matter.

He put on his hat and came to the door. Tito volubly expounded all he knew of the story. Presently Salvador himself came bustling up from the acequia, whip in hand and revolver on hip.

"Looks considerable on the war-path," said the prospector to himself. "Wonder what he means to do *about it*."

"Here," said the cacique in a loud voice to the Indians round, "where 's the horse? why is n't it saddled?"

Stephens stood leaning carelessly against the doorpost, but took no notice of his speech. There was silence for a moment, and then Tito said in a apologetic tone, "Don Estevan says he does n't want to lend her."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the cacique; and then turning to the American and mastering his passion as well as he could, he said, "Lend me your mare, Don Estevan."

"I can't do it, Salvador," said the prospector deliberately. "I want to go to the sierra to-day."

"Oh, the sierra!" said the cacique impatiently. "That will do to-morrow. My daughter is gone and my horse is gone and there 's nothing else to go after them on. You must lend yours for once."

"Not to be ridden to death after them," said Stephens. "Why, they 're leagues away by this time. You 'll have to ride like the very mischief to catch them." There was an accent of contempt in his voice which infuriated the Indian. Stephens valued the mare, which he had brought with him from Denver, above all earthly things, and the idea of letting an Indian ride her near to death in a long, stern chase seemed to him the blankest absurdity. "Why, I would n't do it for my own brother!" he went on. "You can't have her, Cacique, and that 's flat."

"But I must," said the Indian, enraged at an opposition he had not expected. "I must and I will. What 's a horse for but to ride?" He turned to the crowd of Indians behind him, and called out, "Saddle her up, will you, quick!"

Two or three began instantly to run towards the corral, and the rest were starting to follow when the loud, clear voice of the prospector arrested their movement.

"Stop right there!" were his words. "You do no such thing. If anyone touches my stock without my leave I 'll shoot him."

The Indians stopped.

"I 'll drive you out of here, you Americano," said the angry cacique, laying his hand upon the butt of his revolver and advancing directly towards Stephens, who was of course quite unarmed.

"Drive away then, and be d—d to you," returned the American. "I 've hired these rooms from old Reyna till the end of April, and I sha'n't budge before." And his eyes flashed back defiance.

Salvador kept advancing in a threatening manner, and the younger Indian men, of whom there were thirty or forty on the spot, closed up behind their leader; they half felt that he was wrong, but still he was their chosen cacique.

Stephens stood his ground, and faced the mob with dauntless coolness. An odd thing struck him. He knew them all personally quite well, but now he hardly seemed to recognise them. The expression of their faces, usually so peaceful, was entirely altered. It gave him quite a turn to think that people who had crowded round him so full of fun, and so eager to show their friendship and gratitude only the day before, should change so quickly to a cruel mob. Yesterday's momentary outburst of suspicion excited by the dreaded charge of witchcraft had revealed to him the explosive forces that lay hidden under their quiet exterior, but that had been dissipated by his own prompt repudiation of the charge, and by the cacique's influence. Now

it was the cacique himself who was assailing him, and there was none to help, nor hope of anyone. A hundred black, flashing eyes were fixed on him with an angry glare. He felt as if he were shut up in a den of wild beasts. He was quite alone; the new storekeeper at San Remo was the only other American within sixty miles.

"Take your hand off that pistol, Salvador," said he quietly. "You can't scare me, so don't you try it on."

The Indian stopped, but his hand plucked nervously at the hilt of the weapon. Stephens observed his opponent's indecision, and continued: "A pretty lot of fellows you are, to come crowding round me as you did yesterday, and call me your best friend, and say how you 'll sing my praises to the third generation, and now this morning you 're ready to cut my throat before breakfast, all about nothing! I've heard of the gratitude of Indians before now," he continued, "but this beats all."

The Indians visibly winced at this taunt, the justice of which they could not but acknowledge, and began to interchange rapid words in their own language, thereby making themselves unintelligible to Stephens.

Just at this moment came a most welcome diversion. Round the corner dashed Miguel full charge on a fiery steed. The Indians scattered right and left before him. With a jerk on the terrible Spanish bit he set the horse on his haunches, and as he sprang to the ground he cried, "Here, Cacique! Here 's the horse of the new storekeeper at San Remo. I've got him for you."

Salvador never spoke, but seizing the rein offered him by Miguel he sprang to the saddle, turned his back on Stephens and the crowd, and dashed wildly forwards to the trail.

All eyes were bent on his rapid course. The trackers

on foot had already traced the hoof-marks from the acequia across to the Ensenada trail, and were running half a mile off like hounds in full cry. In less than two minutes the galloping horseman overtook them, and cantered alongside to hear what they had to tell. They reported that the tracks were several hours old and that the horse carried double.

"I could have told you that," said Salvador, as he plied the whip freshly, and galloping ahead disappeared in the direction of the mesas from the sight of those who were watching him.

"Wonder what he 'll do if he catches Felipe!" said Stephens to himself as he saw him vanish over the hills. "That young man 'll have to look out for himself, as sure as he 's a foot high. Rather lucky for me," he ruminated, turning to go in, "that chap Miguel's coming up with Backus's horse! I wonder, by the way, how he came to get him. I don't know what I should have done if Mr. Salvador had gone for me with that six-shooter, and he was just about mad enough to try it on. Blamed if it was n't the suddenest scare I ever did get let in for! Why, hallo, Faro, old man," said he aloud, on finding the dog at his heels, "what 's up with you? I don't often see you out of the blankets before breakfast. Blamed if I don't believe you heard me a-talkin' to them fellers and just come out to take a hand!" He was right. The dog's quick ear had caught the note of danger in his master's voice, and he had flown to his assistance.

Stephens took another look at the Indians around. Some were still watching the mesas; others were going about their daily business. It seemed as if those who knew him best kept aloof, feeling ashamed to come up *and speak* to him. However, an old man whom he

hardly knew, and who spoke Spanish badly, approached him in an apologetic sort of way, and said, "Salvador very angry!"

"Well," answered Stephens, with a grim laugh, "I should think he's gone mad."

"Yes, mad, silly," assented the old man; "for why get angry? No good, no good,"—and he stood there wagging his old head and saying "no good" in a way that the prospector quite understood to be intended for an *amende honorable* on the part of his fellows.

Nor was he the only one. "Señor Americano," said a cracked voice close beside him, and Stephens felt a light touch on his elbow. He turned and found himself face to face with Reyna, the Turquoise squaw from whom he rented his rooms. She and her husband lived next door to him, and from her he often bought eggs and meal. She of course had been a witness of the whole affair. She now produced two eggs, and holding them out to him said, "See, two."

"Yes, I see," said Stephens, "but I don't want 'em to-day. Have n't got the five cents."

"No, no!" she cried. "No money—two."

Her Spanish was weaker even than the old man's. Stephens turned to him. "What does she mean?" he asked. "I can't make out what she's up to."

The two Indians exchanged some words in their own language.

"She means, your honour," said the old Indian man, speaking with painful elaboration, "that this is for the gratitude of the Indians. Excuse her, your honour, she does not speak much in Spanish—that is, not like us, the men"—he added explanatorily, "but she can understand, and she heard you say the Indians got no gratitude, and this is for her."

Stephens turned to the old squaw and took the eggs, thanking her as well as he knew how. "And I'm going now to cook them for breakfast," said he, as he went back to his room.

"Well, who'd have thought that?" he said to himself, as he began to whittle shavings from a piece of fat pine to light his fire with. "They're a queer lot, Indians are, but I suppose it takes all sorts of people to make a world." His thoughts wandered back to Salvador and the fugitives. "Wonder what Salvador'll do," he said half aloud. "He's mad enough to kill the boy, if he gets close enough. Blamed if I don't think he was about mad enough to kill me! He's real ugly when he's mad, and it's no foolin' when it comes to six-shooters." He went over the scene of the early dawn again in his mind. "It does beat cock-fightin'," he continued to himself, "how folks like these Indians, that's as quiet and decent and orderly as can be, should flare up all in a moment and glare at you like a lot of wildcats, and all for nothing. Why, if I'd gone and killed somebody, or run off with somebody's wife, there'd be some sense in it, but to burst out just because I would n't lend my mare to be rode plumb to death! It does beat all."

The fire now burned up brightly, and after setting the coffee-pot on to boil he filled the nose-bags himself, and went out to feed his stock. "Confound that boy, running off like this," he grumbled, "and leaving me this job! Told his little brother Tomas, indeed! I don't see him around yet; not much; don't expect to neither."

He leaned up against the fence waiting while the stock ate their feed. Someone must keep watch in *order to drive off* the hungry Indian pigs, who prowled

around and would have disputed their corn with the horses. The sun had just risen, and his level rays lit up like a flame the red cliffs crowned with dark pines, which formed the western side of the valley. But Stephens did not see them. He was facing east, with the sunlight full in his face, and his eyes fixed on the bare, flat-topped table-lands which divided the Santiago valley from the Rio Grande. "Confound him!" he growled again. "What a fool trick for him to play! I'm mighty glad it is n't my mare he's playing it on. He'll find himself in a muss, too, if he don't mind out, sure. I don't more than half like the notion of that ugly savage of a cacique getting after him with a six-shooter."

He waited till the stock had finished feeding, and then went back to his rooms. But he decided not to start for the sierra till the next day. "Confound the boy!" said he the third time. "I can't take that little fool, Tomás, and I want somebody to help me dry the meat and pack it down. Why the dickens could n't he run off some other time! He want a wife! He wants a nurse and a birch rod, I should say."

Thoroughly vexed, he prepared to put in the rest of his morning, or at least as much of it as he could spare from swearing at Felipe's escapade, in fixing up pack-saddles, mending his tent, cleaning his beloved repeating rifle, and generally getting ready for the trip he so unwillingly postponed.

But his plans for the day were destined to be interfered with for the second time. The inquisitive face of Mr. Backus appeared suddenly in the open door.

"Mornin', Mr. Stephens," he began; "can I come in? So this is where you live when you're at home." He dragged a heavy saddle across the threshold and

took a seat. "I told you I would n't be long before comin' up to take a squint at your white squaw."

"She's no squaw of mine, Mr. Backus," said Stephens with rising anger. "I think I told you so already. And if you want to see her you can't, for it so happens that she has just eloped." He turned his back on the storekeeper, kneeling down to arrange his pack-cinches with a preoccupied air.

"Oh," returned the other, "is that it? I did n't tumble to it that she was the one who had bolted." His eye wandered around Stephens's modest abode, taking in every detail, as he tried to gratify his curiosity concerning the prospector's domestic arrangements. It seemed to him an incredible thing that a man should settle down like this among the Indians and not provide himself with at least a temporary wife. But in these bachelor's quarters there was no sign of feminine occupation, temporary or permanent. The one novelty that puzzled him was the neatly built assaying furnace, which he at first took for a new sort of bread oven, until he detected the parcels of ore beside it and its true nature dawned upon him. But postponing the idea of asking questions about it for the present, he went babbling on: "And here I've been and loaned my horse to a chief to go chasing after her upon, and left myself afoot. Guess I'll have to try and borrow that mule of yours to get back to San Remo on." Stephens's face at this suggestion became the picture of disgust. "Say, though," he went on, "I was forgetting. You're badly wanted down there. I come up partly just to tell you that. Don Nepomuceno is in a mighty awkward fix. What do you think that son of his, Andrés, has been up to? You'll never *guess in a month of Sundays*. He's bin and had a

fuss with a Navajo up yonder in the mountains over a game of cards, and killed him, and half burned the body in the camp-fire to try and get rid of the thing. And the Navajos have got right up on their ear about it and there 's a whole band of 'em now down at San Remo wanting old Sanchez to turn 'em over his whole sheep herd to pay for it. How 's that for high, eh ?''

Stephens leaped to his feet. " Who told you this ? " he cried.

" Why, Andrés himself," replied the storekeeper. " I 've seen him. He 's hidden away now in an inner room down at the house. The Indians are having a big pow-wow outside. Oh, they 'd just murder him if they could get their hands on him once."

Without a word Stephens caught up his saddle and his Winchester and started for the door.

" Where are you off to so quick ? " asked Backus, rising also.

" To get my mare," was the answer, " and go straight down there. And you 'd best come along, too. You can have that mule."

CHAPTER XII

PACIFYING A GHOST

"**S**AY," asked Mr. Backus, as the pair rode out of the pueblo side by side, "how 're ye getting on with the silver-mine question? Had any new developments?"

"No," replied the prospector, "I bounced them straight out about it last night, and learned nothing. They just won't open their heads on the subject at all. They simply swear there never was a mine, and I don't believe it's any use to go on working at them."

"And what 'll you do next?" queried the storekeeper.

"To tell you the truth," said Stephens simply, "I've not quite made up my mind what I want to do, but I'm much inclined to chuck it up."

"Look at here," interjected Backus, "did ye ever think to try them Navajos? They used to roam all over these mountains in the old days, and they know 'em still just like a book. They know what silver is, too, for you see all their high-u-muck-a-mucks wearing plates of it all over 'em. How about them knowing where the mine is?"

"I doubt it," returned Stephens. "They 'd have sold the secret of it to the Mexicans long ago if they *had known it.*"

"They 're too suspicious of the Mexicans to do that," said the other; "they don't trust 'em. They 'd be afraid they 'd cheat 'em; but mebbe they might trust you or me enough to think we 'd pay 'em if we promised to."

"They don't trust the Mexicans far, by all accounts," said Stephens, "I allow that much. But say—I want to know more about this fuss between Don Andrés and the Navajo. How was it?"

"Oh," said Backus, "the Navajo came to the sheep camp where Andrés was with his two herders. The Navajo had his squaw along. And he and Andrés got to playing cards by the firelight, and Andrés won all the money he had, six dollars and a half. And then the Injun got mad and swore Andrés had cheated him. And Andrés told him to go to Halifax! And then the Injun got madder, and drawed his butcher-knife and went for Andrés right there. But Andrés was too darn quick for him, and pulled his gun,—he wears a mighty nice pistol, does Andrés, a Smith and Wesson nickel-plated,—and he plugged him just under the heart and laid him out. And then the squaw bawled and ran off into the woods, and Andrés and the two sheep-herders were powerful frightened over what they 'd done, and they chucked the body on the camp-fire to burn it up, and they packed their camp outfit and drove the sheep herd that night right away to the Ojo Escondido. But when the squaw got back to the other Injuns and told them, they just naturally knew their best plan was to come down on old man Sanchez at oncet. That 's why they 're here. They got here this morning, and Andrés come in only a few hours ahead of 'em, about midnight last night."

"Well I 'm sorry for Don Nepomuceno," said Stephens.

"And he's tarnation sorry for himself too, you bet," added the Texan. "He's in an awful sweat over his flock of sheep. I never saw a man look sicker. Why, if the Navajos was to run off his sheep it'd bust him wide open. He's liable to have to make the original herd good to old man Baca, you see."

"By George!" returned Stephens, "I don't wonder he's in a sweat. What does he want to see me for, d' you know?"

"Wal'," replied Backus, "he reckons that as an American you might be able to help him some. The Americans are running this Territory now, and the Navajos have darned good reason to know it, and he thinks they'll mind you. I left him and some of his compadres pow-wowing away with them outside the house, but they had n't come to no conclusion. Pretty Miss Manuelita"—he looked knowingly at the prospector—"was just crying her eyes out over her brother inside. She thinks he'll be killed, sure."

Stephens touched his mare with the spurs. "I'll gallop ahead, I think," he said, raising his reins, "but I'll be obliged to you if you'll bring that mule along quietly and just put him in your stable till I can come round for him. So long." He gave the mare her head, and in a moment she was skimming like a swallow over the gentle undulations of the dusty stretch of the Indian lands. Backus jogged along, watching the mare and her rider grow smaller and smaller in the distance.

"You don't just know what you want yourself," said he, apostrophising his late companion, "but I think I know about what you want, and I'll make it my business, Mr. Stephens, to see that you don't get it." The look in his eye as he spoke was not amiable.

It was not exactly a cheerful sight that greeted the American on his arrival at San Remo. The palaver was in progress, and there against a blank wall outside the Sanchez house squatted eleven very glum-faced Navajos, while on the ground opposite to them in the strong morning light sat Don Nepomuceno and three of his relations who had come to give him their support.

The eleven Indians were the first Navajos Stephens had ever seen, and he eyed them with no little curiosity. "Call these wild Indians?" he felt like saying: "why they look as civilised as the Pueblos." This was because of their dress mainly. They did not have their hair braided in locks with beaver fur like the mountain Utes, or twisted up like any of the plains Indians; each had a bright red kerchief bound turban-wise round his snaky black locks, just like the Pueblo Indians, except that he wore no "chungo," or pigtail, at the back. Neither was their colour as dark as that of the Utes or the Sioux; they were distinctly lighter. "Perhaps living further south they wash more," he thought, "and that may account for it." Then, in lieu of buffalo robes and buckskins they were clad in neat belted tunics and loose cotton breeches, and for a wrap or mantle had gaily striped blankets of their own weaving. "Real tony their blankets are," said he to himself, "and just as pretty as a painted mule." A *pinto*, or piebald, mule is an extraordinary rarity, and it is quoted in the Far West as the highest standard of picturesque beauty.

No; as far as dress went they did not look like wild Indians at all, at least not like any he had ever seen. But when he came to look at their faces he changed his mind. Not that they were all alike; on the contrary the diversity of types was remarkable. There were low-

browed, thick-lipped, thick-nosed, heavy-jawed men among them, and there were others with fine aquiline features and regular, well-shaped mouths. But their bold, impudent, cunning eyes betrayed them. One and all they looked thorough rascals. As Stephens ran his eye over them, his acute glance rested on a big, hawk-faced man with a sullen expression, who sat in the middle of them smoking a cigarette with an air of unconcern. His broad leather belt was studded with great bosses of shining silver.

"How," said Stephens, dismounting and looking straight at this Indian whom he took for the chief, but the latter gazed at him stolidly without taking any notice. The Mexican rose and welcomed him warmly.

"Come round with me to the corral, Don Estevan," said Sanchez as he dismounted; "let me put the mare up for you. Pedro, the peon, is keeping the house door. My unlucky boy Andrés is inside. Ah, what a foolish boy to go and gamble with an Indian! The storekeeper will have told you of our trouble."

"Yes," said Stephens, "he told me that the Navajos were demanding your whole flock of sheep."

"Oh, not really," replied the Mexican; "that is, they only threaten to take them if I don't pay. But they positively and actually have the impudence to demand that I should pay them a thousand dollars, silver dollars, for one scrub Indian," he groaned.

"It sounds a good lot," said Stephens reflectively.

"Oh, it's ridiculous," said the disconsolate Mexican. "A thousand dollars for one miserable, low-down Indian. I've offered them a hundred and twenty-five, and that's more than he was worth to them twice over. But they say he belonged to Ankitona's family." He *busied himself* undoing the latigo strap of the hair cinch.

"But, look here," rejoined the American, to whom this exact appraisal of the value of one "low-down Indian" was a novelty; "according to the way Mr. Backus gave me the story as we rode down, I can't see why you should have to pay anything to them at all. If Don Andrés killed the Indian in self-defence, any court in this country would clear him. Do they deny it? Do they say that he attacked the Indian first?"

"Oh, no," said the Mexican, "you don't understand; his acting in self-defence does n't make any difference." He spread the saddle blanket over the mare, tying it on with a cord surcingle. "She's hot," he observed, "she'd best have it on till she's cool. No," he repeated, as they turned back to the scene of the palaver, "it is n't a matter where law courts count for anything. Our courts don't ever bind the Navajos. The one thing that does count in our dealings with them is whether we are at peace or at war. Now, if we were at war with them at present they would n't come here to ask for pay. No, they'd go straight off and just kill or carry away captive any Mexicans they could catch in revenge. But, you see, we're at peace; so the rule is, if any Mexican kills a Navajo he must pay. They think that if his family don't make the Mexicans pay up for the dead man his ghost will haunt them. Their religion, you see, binds them, if I don't pay, to kill my son, or else maybe me, or some other member of my family; and very likely they'll cut my sheep herd some night and run off a lot of the sheep besides. Oh, I've got to pay." He groaned again.

"Well, Don Nepomuceno," said the American, "I'm real sorry to hear of your ill-luck. I call it a very hard case. If there's anything I can do to help you, you can count on me. All the same, if that In-

dian came at Don Andrés with a knife I don't myself see what else he could do except shoot, and I ain't the man to blame him for defending himself. Say, now, before we go back to where the Navajos are, you just tell me what you think I can do to be of assistance."

The strictly business footing, so to speak, on which Don Nepomuceno dealt with the subject puzzled the prospector not a little, and he was afraid lest by interfering ignorantly he might only make things worse.

"Well, Don Estevan, these Navajos think a deal of an American's opinion, naturally ; so, since you are so kind, I want you to use your influence with them to make them take a more reasonable sum. A thousand dollars is all nonsense. He was quite a poor scrub Indian. He had hardly any sheep of his own, and no pony. They admit that he lived off the richer men of his family, so I say that they're well rid of him. They're really richer without him. He was, among them, like one of the poorest of our peons here. I declare if I gave them fifty dollars for him it would be plenty. But he was one of the family of Ankitona, and he's a very powerful chief, with lots of relations. He's not here himself—not he. He has sent his sister's son though, Mahletonkwa. He's that tall Indian with a hooked nose and the big row of silver plates all round his belt. He's a terribly bad Indian. He boasts that he never surrendered to the Americans,—that they never could take him to the Pecos. I think he's rather afraid of them all the same, though he says he is n't, and swaggers about with his band of desperadoes. But he's quite the worst Navajo going, and there has n't been a piece of mischief done in the last two years without him and his gang having a hand in it. They're the terror of the whole country. There's another rascal there

that 's pretty near as bad as he is. That 's the one with two feathers in his head-dress—Notalinkwa his name is. He 's a villain too."

" I see," answered Stephens; " you want me to talk to this—what do you call him—Mahletonkwa, and tell him that he 's got to come down a bit in his price. Do you think that 'll do any good ? "

The Mexican turned his eager eyes full on Stephens, and laid his hand on his arm. " I think it will," he cried ; " you are an American, and all the Navajos think that it 's their cue to keep on good terms with the Americans. They are a good deal afraid of them since the time of their defeat in the Cañon de Chelly, when they learned to fear the brave Coronel Christophero Carson and that *valiente capitán*, Albert Pfeiffer. That was several years ago, and after that they surrendered and were taken away beyond Santa Fé and kept over on the Pecos. They did hate that ; they were nearly starved there, and lots of them died, and a good job too. It is only a couple of years now since they have been allowed to come back to their own country. But even those who never were caught and taken to the Pecos heard the story of it, and they, too, fear the Americans. Oh yes, they listen to their agent, Señor Morton, at Cañon Bonito."

" Well, then," exclaimed Stephens, " there 's our man. Of course the Indian agent is the proper person to appeal to in a matter of this sort. Shall I tell this Mahletonkwa, then, that the moment he goes to cutting up any didoes on his own hook round here the agent will be down on him like a knife ? I 'll just inquire what right Mr. Mahletonkwa has got to come here anyhow—yes, or to be off his reservation at all. If Don Andrés had gone on to their reservation and

killed a Navajo there, then there might be something to be said for their side of the argument, but if a Navajo comes here among the Mexican sheep herds he 's got to abide by the laws of New Mexico, I say."

" Oh, Don Estevan, that 's no use," answered the other sadly. " He don't care two *reales* about the laws. No, you tell him that Señor Morton will make the soldiers come and shoot him if he or any of his family kill my son ; make him believe that, if you can, and you 'll be doing some good."

" I 'll try," said the American doubtfully, " but I hardly expect he 'll mind much what I say."

The pair walked round the house to the south side, where the Navajos were sitting, and squatted down on the dry, sandy soil opposite them, alongside of the three Mexicans. Stephens got out his tobacco-bag and passed it round before he filled his own pipe, and began to smoke with calculated deliberation. He had at least learned one lesson, that it is no use to hurry an Indian if you want to do business with him.

Having got his pipe thoroughly alight and returned his tobacco-bag to his pocket, he looked at Mahle-tonkwa, and said, " You come from Fort Defiance ? "

The Agency at Fort Defiance, called by the Mexicans Cañon Bonito, is just over the border line between New Mexico and Arizona, and well in the middle of the Navajo country.

" No," said the Indian briefly ; " more this side."

" You got leave from the agent to be off the reservation ? " asked Stephens sharply.

The Indian parried this question. " I come from my mother's brother, Ankitona," he said. " He mucho bravo—very angry about this thing." He indicated the killing by Don Andrés.

"Likely enough," said Stephens, "but that 's no answer to my question. What I want to know is if you 've got leave."

"I don't ask anybody's leave," said Mahletonkwa defiantly. "I 'm not the slave of the Americans. I never went to Bosque Redondo." Bosque Redondo was the scene of their captivity over on the Pecos River.

"Indeed !" retorted Stephens; "but, if you hear me talk, it might have been better for you if you had. You might have had a chance to learn how to behave yourself." If this audacious redskin was going to put on any frills with him he proposed to check him up short right at the start.

Mahletonkwa chose to look very surly at this rebuff. Then he repeated his previous assertion. "Ankitona very angry indeed about this."

"And quite right of him too," said Stephens. "He ought to be very angry with your man who went and got himself killed. You 've got no right to say it 's Don Andrés's fault, if he had to defend himself. The man who drew the knife is to blame."

The Indian dissented by a gesture, but made no verbal reply. Disregarding Sanchez's warning of the futility of this argument, Stephens laboured to prove that killing done in self-defence was nothing more than justifiable homicide. But his words seemed to take no effect on the Indian, who smoked on stolidly till it was evident that all this talk was to no purpose. In an undertone Don Nepomuceno hinted as much.

When at last the Navajo condescended to answer, his view of the affair proved to be very much as the Mexican had prophesied. To him it did not matter three straws, he explained, who struck the first blow

or who was to blame for the quarrel. His point was that the family had lost a valuable asset in the shape of a warrior, for which they required a good round sum in compensation, and not only that, but enough to enable them to give their lost relative a number of gifts that would make him comfortable in the next world. He would require a good deal to make him comfortable, too, for not only had he been killed, but he had been sadly disfigured ; an undeniable fact, for of course the charred object that had been partly destroyed with fire was a horrid sight. The dead warrior's spirit was exceedingly angry, said Mahletonkwa, and required to be appeased with liberal offerings, and if he was n't properly mollified he would take it out of his neglectful family by haunting them. Under this spiritual compulsion it was clear that all the family were bound to rise to the situation, he argued. There was no choice left them ; they were absolutely bound, by some means or other, to extract satisfaction from the family of the slayer. He was very much in earnest. It was n't war by any means ; no, it was a mere family affair, so to speak. But there it was, and it would have to be arranged.

It took Stephens some time to become convinced that Don Nepomuceno was right, and that the dead man's ghost was at the bottom of it all.

" You see, this is how it is, Don Estevan," said the Mexican, speaking to him aside. " These Navajos have a sort of Purgatory of their own. Heaven forgive me for comparing their heathen superstitions to our holy religion, but I want to make you understand. You know when our friends die we give the proper offerings to the priest to say masses to make their stay *in Purgatory* shorter. Well, now you have heard

Mahletonkwa say that these Indians have their religion, which is all false, of course, only they are obstinate and believe it, and according to that it is necessary for the family to give presents to make the spirits of the dead more happy. And they are very much afraid if they don't do it ; oh yes, they are grossly superstitious ; but how can I help it ? How can I teach them better ? These heathens are very expensive to deal with. If he were a Christian it would n't cost me half so much, but I don't suppose you could make him see how foolish he is."

He paused, as if a new idea had struck him. " Could you, do you think "—he added eagerly—" could you show him the error of his ways ? "

" Jerusalem, no ! " cried Stephens, taken considerably aback, " I rather guess not. I 'm not a missionary by a long shot. No sir-ee, that 's a trade I never had a go at, but I 'll tell you what we used to say up in Montana : ' The best missionary is a gain-twist, hair-trigger rifle that will convert a Sioux Indian at three hundred yards every pop. ' That 's what we said there ; but I 'll admit that these southern Indians down here are a very different sort of folk. The Sioux were pure, unadulterated savages, but these Navajos seem to be part human. Still, I don't see my way to wading in at Messrs. Mahletonkwa and Co. with a hymn-book. " He chuckled to himself at the naïveté of the Mexican's suggestion.

" Yes," said the latter regretfully, " I feared you could n't do it. After all, to be missionaries is the business of the padres and not of you or me. But I like what you told me about the missionary rifle of the Americans that converts an Indian at three hundred yards. You tell him that ; preach that to him ; put it

strong." He evidently had great faith in the moral influence of the American over the Navajos from the mere fact of his being an American.

"Very well," replied Stephens, with a certain pride of race in the appeal thus made, "I'll see what I can do. Look here, Mahletonkwa," he continued, addressing the chief, "I've heard your talk about this unfortunate incident, and I quite see that you've got reason on your side, looking at it from your point of view. Of course, our point of view is quite different; but we'll waive that for the moment. Very well. Here's Don Nepomuceno making you a very liberal offer of a hundred and twenty-five dollars to settle the matter. Now that's a lot of money; and if you're the wise man I take you for, you'll close with it and accept his offer. That's my advice to you. You'll find it best in the end, much better business than trying to fight the United States soldiers. The soldiers have got repeating rifles, heap-shoot guns, mind you. If you refuse, and go and take the law into your own hands, and attack Don Andrés, or any of his family, you'll smart for it. I give you fair warning. If you touch them I'll have the soldiers sent after you. Captain Pfeiffer aint dead yet. You've heard of him, so don't you make any mistake about that. You hear me talk; and what I say I'll do. My tongue is straight. I have spoken."

His words carried weight and produced some effect, as two of the Navajos at once began to urge something on their chief with great earnestness in their own language, apparently wishing him to comply. Stephens had adopted the crisp, pungent sentences that appeal most to the redskin's taste. But Mahletonkwa *was in no hurry* to come to terms, and presently re-

plied to Stephens at some length, explaining that the offer was most inadequate. More cash for themselves and gifts for the dead man were indispensable, absolutely indispensable. His terms were still a thousand dollars, neither more nor less.

"I believe that other chap—what d' you call him? Notalinkwa, looks as if he was inclined to vote for taking your offer," said Stephens to Don Nepomuceno. He had been observing the faces of the rest of the Indians very closely while Mahletonkwa was speaking. "Look here. Let's leave him and his friends to argue it out; I'm sure by their looks some of them want him to give way. They'll talk better if we're not by. Come along to the store or somewhere."

"Come into the house," said the Mexican, jumping up; "we can talk better too when we are by ourselves," and he led the way to the great door leading into the patio, now strongly barred and fastened. At the master's summons the peon who was on guard hastened to unbar; the door was partly opened and they slipped in, the master of the house quickly assisting the peon to replace the wooden beams that secured it as soon as they were inside, while Stephens shook hands with Don Andrés, a tall, well-built young Mexican, who would have been very handsome had he not been marked with smallpox.

"How do you do, Don Andrés?" he said heartily. "I'm sorry for this trouble you've got into. However, let's hope it can be fixed up all right."

"It's very unlucky," returned the young Mexican; "I did n't want to kill him, but he would have it. I had to do something to defend my life."

"That's just what I say," assented Stephens; "I was putting it to Mahletonkwa like that just now, only

he would n't see it. He jumped the track entirely, and went off into a rigmarole about ghosts and such like stuff, where I could n't follow him, nohow."

"You were an exasperating, foolish boy!" exclaimed Don Nepomuceno testily to his son, as the door-beam was finally wedged into its place. "It's all your fault," he broke out, with vexation and almost despair in his voice. "What I shall do I don't know. You've gone and acted like an idiot. I've told you to stop your gambling a thousand times, and then you must go and gamble with an Indian, a scrub Indian! Yes, an idiot, that's what you are. Come in, Don Estevan, come into the house," and he led the way to the big living-room, Don Andrés following rather sheepishly. Not a word did he venture to say in reply to his angry father's tirade. "Honour thy father" is a commandment that is far from being obsolete in New Mexico. If his father had taken a rod in his wrath and beaten him, this tall young man would have dutifully submitted himself.

"Sit down," said the master of the house hospitably, pointing to the divan; "take a seat here, Don Estevan. Will you have something to eat?"

"Well, thank you, Don Nepomuceno," answered Stephens, "since you are so kind, I think I will, if it is n't too much trouble. The fact is, I came down without my breakfast."

"Ho, there, Juana!" cried the Mexican, running to the door, "and you, my sister! Make haste, set breakfast for the señor. He is hungry. Be quick now." A scurrying of feet was heard in the kitchen at the sound of his commanding voice. "And make him *tortillas* of wheat flour," his loud tones went on, "hot *tortillas* with fat, and coffee; see that you make coffee."

He came back and seated himself beside Stephens. "What do you think about it, señor?" he inquired. "What is the best thing to be done?"

"Well, if you ask me my deliberate opinion," said Stephens, leaning back and crossing his left leg over the other with his hands clasped round the knee, "I should say this: It seems to be perfectly clear that these Indians are outside the law; it's no use to appeal to it with them. Now the mail goes by here to-day, noon, towards Santa Fé. I say, write to the governor of the Territory at Santa Fé, and to the general commanding the United States troops there, and tell them about it, and ask their protection. They're bound to give it you. And write to the Navajo Agency at Fort Defiance, and tell the agent there, and ask him to have Mahletonkwa and his band brought back on to the reservation. And I should tell the Indians exactly what I was doing, and warn them once more that they'll certainly have the United States cavalry after them if they don't behave. If that makes them any more inclined to accept your offer of a hundred and twenty-five dollars, why, of course you'll count them out the money and settle it out of hand. I should call a settlement cheap at a hundred and twenty-five dollars cash down. More than that, if I was you, I'd raise my offer a trifle, if I thought I could afford it, so as to meet them. You heard Mahletonkwa say he wanted gifts, some sheep and a pony, to sacrifice for the dead man's ghost. I gather by what you tell me about their religion, that he thinks that if he kills them for him specially, the dear departed can go and corral the ghosts of the pony and sheep in the happy hunting-grounds, and have the full benefit of them there. Now, you must have in your flock some old six-tooth ewes, that

likely will never breed another lamb ; give him a dozen or two to butcher. And then, could n't you trade for, or borrow, some old stove-up pony, very cheap, and let him have that, too? That won't ruin you. I take it the Navajos mean to keep your good hard silver dollars for themselves, and they 'll religiously send the foundered old sheep and pony ghosts to keep their defunct relative company in the sweet by-and-by." The notion of this ghostly herd tickled his cynical humour mightily.

" Yes, perhaps I might do that," said Sanchez in a saddened voice. To part with any of his cherished flock is like drawing eye-teeth for a Mexican. " I might let them have a few of my oldest ewes ; they come in very useful for mutton, but if I must, I must. And my brother-in-law has a handsome pony who is *inyerbado* ; he ate poison-weed over on the Rio Grande a year ago, and has never been any use since. That dead Navajo was a very poor scrub, and it would be more than good enough for him ; he ought to be uncommonly grateful for it."

He spoke so feelingly that it really seemed as if he almost half believed in the Purgatory of the Navajos himself. He hesitated and then went on. " But as for the letters, Don Estevan, it's not so easy. For one thing, the governor and the general don't know Spanish ; and then, you know, I have n't much English, and I'm not much of a hand at letter-writing anyhow. I could n't manage the letters."

" Oh, if that's all," returned the other, " I'll write the letters for you willingly enough. Indeed, as I'm an American, it's just possible they may be a trifle more ready to pay attention to them. Yes, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write out an account of the

killing of the Navajo for Don Andrés, like an affidavit, and he shall sign it, and then we 'll have Mr. Backus witness it and put on the post-office stamp. He 's a sort of a United States official, and it may help to make them feel more called upon to take notice of it. That 'll come as near to being a regular legal document as anything we can scare up out here. I do like to do everything in correct legal style, when I can. I 'm all for law and order every time. That 's me."

" Ah, Don Estevan," said the elder Mexican, " it is you that have the clear head. I am very much obliged to you. Your plan is the good one."

" Very well, then," answered Stephens, " I 'll just run over to the post-office, and get some paper and envelopes and stamps, and draw up those letters ; and as Don Andrés had better not go outside the house before the matter is settled, I 'll ask Mr. Backus to step around here in the course of an hour, and bring his post-office stamp with him."

He rose from his seat to go towards the door, but Don Nepomuceno hospitably protested. " Wait till you have had your breakfast first, Don Estevan. It is all ready ; here is Manuelita bringing it for you " ; and as he spoke the girl entered and set the table for him, as Juana had done on the previous day. She smiled at his greeting, but her eyelids were swollen with crying.

At this moment there came a knocking at the outer door, and the master of the house hastened out to see who it was demanding admittance, and was followed by his son.

" He 's all right," said Stephens cheerfully to the girl, as he looked into her anxious eyes. " He 's safe enough as long as he stays inside here. They 'll none bother him while he 's protected by these walls. And

I 've good hopes that we may be able to bring them to a reasonable settlement, so that he can go about again in perfect safety. Don't you fret yourself over it. We 'll make these Navajos sing a proper tune before we 've done with them." He spoke with the easy confidence of a man accustomed to deal with serious affairs, and conscious of possessing the ability and the experience for handling them successfully. But he was equally astonished and embarrassed when Manuelita, instead of appearing calmed by his reassuring words, flung her hands over her face and burst into a passion of sobs.

CHAPTER XIII

A GIRL'S TEARS

AT the girl's outburst Stephens was completely taken aback. Tears, a woman's tears, were a novelty to him, and he felt the quick leap of his heart in response. But it was ten years since he had heard a woman sob, and his practical sympathy, or at least the power of expressing it, had become blunted. He did not know what to say ; half a dozen phrases struggled to be born in his throat ; he wanted to explain at once to the pretty creature that it was all right ; to tell her that there was nothing to cry about ; to say there was no use in getting into a fuss over it ; that after all a man had to take his chances ; and that anyhow the milk was n't spilt yet ; that it would be time enough to begin to cry when something really happened. But he felt the brutal stupidity of such remarks, and they remained unspoken, while there arose in him at the same instant the urgent desire to do something ; to take her by the hand like a frightened child ; to smooth her ruffled hair and staunch her tears ; to console her, and, by some means or other, stay the sobs that shook the slender body. But he had no right to do any such thing, and he hesitated to intrude himself on her grief, which, moreover, appeared to him, like a child's, a trifle exaggerated. To him who had lived so many

years on the frontier, a violent death had come to seem almost the natural end. Few pioneers expected to die in their beds. Along the trails and around the mining-camps were many mounds, each one of which marked a six-by-two claim that was the last that the holder would ever occupy, one that he needed no ever-ready Winchester to defend. Nameless graves they were for the most part, or if there slanted at the head some rude board with a name and date roughly scribbled to say who lay beneath, the brief legend that gave all that would ever be known of how he came there repeated with monotonous regularity the tale of misadventure or of wrong. "Shot, stabbed, stripped and mangled by Thugs," "Killed by Indians," "Murdered by road-agents," "Lynched by Vigilantes," "Blown up by dynamite," "Crushed by a fall of rock," "Died of starvation," "Died of thirst," "Died of cold,"—these and such as they were the forms of death with which his Odyssey of toils had made him familiar. Small wonder, then, if he who had lived so long face to face with the possibility of such an end, taking the chances of it freely himself, and seeing them taken as freely by others, now felt as if the young man Don Andrés was a trifle overpityed. He was sorry for him himself, he was trying to help him all he knew, and he was ready to turn out and fight for him at any minute, but he could not see why anybody should want to cry about it. And yet here was this startlingly agitating, insistent noise of a girl sobbing beside him that gripped his heart with an emotion he hardly knew the meaning of.

"Don't you fret yourself," he repeated; "we'll see *him* through, señorita, never fear."

Instinctively he had risen to his feet and was stand-

ing by her ; and presently she recovered herself and began to speak, though brokenly at first.

" It is very foolish of me, I know, but I cannot help it. It makes me think how my two uncles were killed by the Indians eight years ago up in the mountain. My grandfather found them both lying dead in the trail ; the cruel Navajos had shot them both with arrows from an ambush. My poor grandfather was alone, so he could not carry them down ; he had to leave them there, while he came back to San Gabriel for help. He cried so much that he grew blind and could hardly find his way to San Gabriel. And then their bodies were brought down here ; I was only a child like Altagracia, but I remember it so well, and indeed this was a house of mourning ; and now if they kill my brother too, I don't know what I shall do."

Again Stephens felt the odd sense of surprise at the strength of her feelings. Don Andrés was a fine young fellow enough in his way, but why all this display of emotion because he was now to run rather more risk than usual ? Dimly he became conscious that her trouble was due to family affection, and that he himself had forgotten what it was like. His mind fled back to his boyhood, when he and a brother and sister, from whom he had now been long parted, used to play together ; memories of that early fondness came back with a curious vividness. A hard crust had formed over the gentler side of his nature during the years of isolation and severance from those natural ties ; it seemed ready now to dissolve in a moment at a few tears shed by a girl for a brother's peril. Habituated as he was to hold himself firmly in hand, he was half angry with himself for minding anything so much as he minded her sobs.

"Why, how fond you must be of him!" he remarked crudely; and without his intending it, his secret surprise showed itself in his tone.

"But he is my brother," she returned, and her wet eyes met his half indignantly; "don't you understand that I must care for him very much indeed?"

"Surely yes," he rejoined. "Of course I understand that"; but in his heart came a denial that he did really understand it, or had any right to understand it. "If I had been clubbed to death for witchcraft in the ditch yesterday by those Santiago idiots," he thought, "not one human soul would have cared like this about me." Yes; it was quite true. There was no one now who cared for him in this way, with this warmth of feeling, and there was no one for whom he cared or could care. Thence came a new sense of something lacking in his life; even supposing that all his hopes deferred were to be realised at last, supposing that to-morrow, for instance, he became master of a mine worth a million, who would rejoice? No one, unless it were Rocky, his old pard, who really was n't a bad-hearted sort of fellow, though he could play the fool at times to such exasperating effect. But now he felt a sudden vacancy in his heart; the need of a comradeship that should be entire, absolute, and inalienable.

"And have you no family, Don Estevan?" she asked; "no brother or sister?"

"Yes," he answered, "I have both, but I have n't seen them in ten years. They are married and settled down away back there in the States; they must have half forgotten me by this time; I was no more than a boy when I started for the West, and I've never been back." And at the recollection his lips parted, and *his breast heaved gently*. An involuntary sigh escaped

him before he knew what it was. The sighing mood had not been much in his line. Manuelita looked at him with a question in her eyes.

"But you love them still?" she said.

"Well, yes," he replied, "I suppose I do, if it comes to that. But it is a long time since I saw them, and much water has run under the bridges between then and now."

"Have the Americans no feelings?" she said; "perhaps it is a good thing for some people to have the heart hard."

"Oh, I guess we've got our feelings right enough," he replied, with an uneasy smile, "but it is n't our way to say much about them; at least, with us, the men don't like to show them. As for the American women, I think they show theirs freely enough; but upon my word it is so long since I have seen any of them that I hardly know. No, señorita, our hearts are not hard."

At this moment, Don Nepomuceno entered, bringing with him one of the three Mexicans who had been sitting with him outside. "Here is my brother-in-law, Don Estevan," he began, "who says that he will gladly let me have the pony that ate poison-weed. He says, too, that the Navajos have gone over to the store, and that he suspects the Texan will sell them whiskey. It is very wrong of him, for whiskey makes them very dangerous."

"It's dead against the law," said Stephens bluntly.

"I know," rejoined the other, "but it is not easy to prove it. But you have eaten no breakfast, my friend. Sit down and have your meal." At the entrance of her father, Manuelita had retired to the kitchen, leaving the sitting-room to the men.

"Thank you," answered Stephens, "I will, then, by your leave"; and he sat down and helped himself, while he continued to discuss with the others the conduct of Mr. Backus and the chances of coming to an arrangement with Mahletonkwa. The conversation went on after he had finished his meal, when the sudden sharp report of a rifle-shot was heard not far away. All stopped and listened; a minute or two later it was followed by a second, and then at pretty regular intervals by a number of others.

"It sounds like somebody practising at a mark," said the American; "do you suppose it's Mr. Backus?" He had risen to his feet and stood intent.

"Who knows?" said his host. "For my part I know not much about this Texan. It may be so; they are unaccountable people." To throw away powder and bullets on practice seemed to him a piece of wanton extravagance.

Stephens caught up his rifle into the hollow of his arm. "I think," said he, "I'll just step across and get that paper and envelopes, and I'll be able to see what they're up to over there as well." The Mexicans accompanied him to the big door, which was carefully unbarred to allow of his departure.

The occasional shots continued as the American walked down towards the stage station, and he presently discerned Mr. Backus and the Navajos in a group behind the store. He went up and joined them. They had set up an empty box against a blank wall, and fastened a piece of white cardboard against it with a nail through the centre, and several black circles in different parts of the cardboard showed where bullets had struck. The Indians were laughing and chaffing *one another* freely about their shooting; their manner

had noticeably altered from the moody and sullen attitude they had exhibited at the pow-wow.

Mahletonkwa came close up to Stephens excitedly.

"Now, then, Don Americano, let's see you take a shot."

Stephens smelt him ; there was whiskey in his breath. "Not at present, thank you," said he shortly. "Mr. Backus," and he turned abruptly on the storekeeper, "this Indian has had something to drink. I presume you know it is against the law."

"Well, if he has nobody knows where he got it," said the storekeeper defiantly, "nor nobody need know."

He knew very well himself that there were now two beautiful Navajo blankets rolled up in his store which had not been there an hour ago ; also that his stock was diminished to the extent of two bottles of whiskey. The whiskey stood him in exactly one dollar. The pair of Navajo blankets were cheap at ten. Nine hundred per cent. profit was good enough business for any man.

It was a good enough profit, at all events, to tempt Mr. Backus; and it needed to be a good one, for he was not ignorant of the risk that he ran. To give, trade, or sell spirituous liquor to an Indian is a penitentiary offence in the United States. The law is a wise one, and, what is more, is approved by popular feeling. A drunken Indian is about as pleasant to meet with as a mad wolf ; he is possessed by a demon that prompts him to fly at the throat of any white man, woman, or child he comes across ; and an Indian who has tasted liquor will go any length till he has obtained enough of it to throw him into this horrible frenzy, if he can by any means procure it. Trading whiskey to an Indian is like playing with a tiger. Up to a certain point it is

pleasantly exciting. Go one step beyond it and his fangs are in your jugular. Mr. Backus was not a novice at the game ; he had been there before. For nine hundred per cent. he would let them have just enough to whet their appetites. Two bottles of whiskey to eleven Indians was about the right dose ; while half a dozen would send them crazy, he knew.

" I 'm just letting them have a few shots at the mark with my rifle," he continued. " It tickles them to death to shoot with a breech-loader ; they aint hardly got any themselves, and it 's mighty well worth my while to keep in with them." He winked deliberately. " I 've been talking with them, and they know all about this mine upon the Cerro de las Viboras, just as well as those stingy Santiago folks. I believe I 'll get 'em to show it me. I tell you I understand Indians, I 'm an old hand at dealing with them " ; he gave a self-satisfied chuckle.

" I should say that last statement of yours was highly probable," returned the prospector. " Personally, I should have said that with this unsettled difficulty on hand with Don Nepomuceno the very worst thing possible was to let them have any drink, and the next worst was to encourage them to go letting off a gun like this right close to where he lives."

" And why the deuce should I be so cursedly particular about the Don ?" replied the storekeeper ; " he 's an uncommon close-fisted old hunk, if it comes to that ; he does most of his trading in Santa Fé anyway, and don't encourage local talent. And I 'll warrant you he 's got a thumping big hoard of silver dollars buried under the floor somewhere in that old *casa* of his. I don't see why he should n't pay a decent compensation to this Mahletonkwa here." The chance of some

of those silver dollars passing from Mahletonkwa's hands over his counter had considerably quickened Mr. Backus's sense of "justice for the poor Indian" in this matter. Also he had had a couple of drinks as well as Mahletonkwa, and they had loosened his tongue a little.

"Well, sir," replied Stephens, "I don't propose to argue the matter with you here, but if you can afford to leave those precious customers of yours I should like to have you come into the store and supply me with some paper and envelopes."

He hated to have to ask this man for anything, but he must procure these things, and there was no other house in San Remo where he could get them. There would not be time before the mail passed to return to the pueblo and get them from his own stock.

At this moment Mahletonkwa fired again with Backus's rifle, and a triumphant exclamation followed the shot. The Indians ran to the target, pointing with pride to a bullet-hole within half an inch of the central nail. Mahletonkwa swaggered up to the American. "Now, you shoot," he exclaimed familiarly, "and show us what you can do."

Stephens had not intended to do anything of the sort. He thought the Indian's familiarity, due to the couple of drinks he had taken, most offensive, and he had meant to leave them to their sport with the least possibly delay; but there was something irritating about his swagger that put the American on his mettle. He swung himself half round and took a good look at the target, which stood there in a strong light, beautifully distinct, at some five-and-twenty paces distance.

Up came the rifle to his shoulder; for one instant it remained there, poised level, as he glanced down the

sights and got a bead on the centre ; " bang ! " came the report, and down fell the piece of cardboard. He had driven up the nail.

The Navajos dashed in eagerly to pick up the paper, and were loud in their expression of wonder and admiration. But Mahletonkwa's eyes were still fixed on the Winchester; he came forward and touched it lightly with his hand, and turned with a loud laugh to the others who came crowding round them. Mahletonkwa told them a story in the Navajo language which produced roars of laughter from them all, and Stephens's curiosity was excited.

" What 's the joke, Mahletonkwa ? " said he. " Why can't you tell it in Spanish so the rest of us may have a chance to join in the fun ? " The drinks had made the Indian reckless, and he needed but little urging to repeat the story.

" Once there was a man out in the mountains over yonder," said he, pointing to the west, " and he had a ' heap-shoot ' gun like this."

" What sort of a man do you mean ? " asked Stephens ; " an American ? "

The Indian looked at him with eyes that were both bold and cunning. " I did n't ask him," said he ; " he was just a man."

" I 'll bet he was a lone American prospector," returned Stephens.

The Navajo laughed, and there was insolence in his laugh. " He was alone," he continued, " and the people there got after him——"

" What people do you mean ? " asked Stephens ; " the Navajos ? "

The Indian laughed the same laugh as before.

" Oh, leave him finish," interjected Backus in Eng-

lish. "You can bet he means Navajos. Probably he was there himself."

"The people got after him," repeated the redskin, "and he fired away at them a long time with his 'heap-shoot' gun; but he could n't do them any harm." An insolent chuckle accompanied this last remark.

"Could n't he!" rejoined Stephens. "If he was an American prospector, and there's no other sort of man ever went there with a Winchester, I'll bet he laid some of them out."

"And then," continued Mahletonkwa, "one of the people shot him with a common rifle here across the face," he drew his hand across his forehead, "and the blood ran into his eyes and he could n't see, and the blow of the bullet made him stupid, and then the people went up to him and he was a prisoner. And they took his gun and looked at it with much awe, for they had never seen a 'heap-shoot' gun before. But they did not understand how to make it work. So they gave him some water, and wiped the blood from his face so that he could see, and they asked him to show them the secret of the 'heap-shoot' gun. And he was very happy then, and thought that they were going to make friends with him, so he told them how to work the gun, and showed them how to load it and unload it. And then, when they had found out all they wanted to know about it, one of them took the 'heap-shoot' gun and loaded it just as the Amer—the man had shown them how to do, and pointed it at him and pulled the trigger, and it killed him quite dead." He exploded again in a great roar of laughter, and the rest of the party roared in chorus with equal mirth.

Stephens flushed a dark red, and swore under his

breath. "They were a d—d treacherous, sneaking lot of coyotes, that 's what 'they were," he said defiantly to Mahletonkwa, who only laughed the more. "A pretty lot of friends you seem to have been making, Mr. Backus. I wish you joy of them."

The latter looked rather uncomfortable. "It was a low-down, dirty mean trick to play," he said, starting to go towards the store, "but Mahletonkwa aint said as he had any hand in it himself."

"I reckon he was there, though," retorted Stephens, "for it was the sight of my Winchester that set him off to tell it. Rifles like that aint quite as common as blackberries around this country. I wish I knew who that prospector was that they murdered," he added meditatively, as he moved off to the store after Backus; "I 'd go and bury him decently, anyway, if I could find the place. I hope he laid out a score of them before they got him, the mean hounds. And that 's their idea of a funny story!" He ground his teeth in his anger.

In the store Mr. Backus soon supplied the prospector with writing materials, and promised to bring over the post-office stamp presently to stamp Don Andrés's affidavit. He seemed nervously anxious now to conciliate Stephens, and to rub out, if possible, the bad impression his conduct with regard to the Navajos had left. He fetched round Captain Jinks from the stable with profuse thanks for the loan, and even reclaimed his rifle from the Navajos and put a stop to their target practice on the ground that he could not spare any more cartridges.

"Mahletonkwa," said Stephens, gathering up the lariat of his mule and addressing the chief, "I give you notice that I 'm going to have you put back on the

reservation. Take my advice and lose no time in accepting Don Nepomuceno's offer."

"I want a thousand dollars," said the Indian doggedly.

"And I very much doubt your getting it," said Stephens, turning on his heel and walking off.

But as the prospector made his way towards the Sanchez house the thought of Manuelita's tears came back to him. After all, what was a thousand dollars? It was a lot of money to be sure, but if it would guarantee young Andrés's safety, and put an end to her anxiety, it might be worth while to part with it. The brutal laughter of the Indians over the cruel deception they had so cunningly practised on the wounded American who had the ill fortune to fall into their hands had angered him deeply. He had from the first kicked against the idea of paying them anything, but if some blackmail was to be paid to them, he saw no difference in principle between a thousand dollars and a hundred and twenty-five. And it came into his head Rocky had just offered to repay him the thousand dollars he had lent him in Montana. The idea occurred to him, why not pass it on? He might lend it to Don Nepomuceno to pay off the Navajos with, and the Mexican might repay him at his leisure, or pass it on again on a fitting occasion to some other man in a bad strait. Backus's idea of Don Nepomuceno possessing a great hoard of buried silver dollars seemed to him a wild and improbable conjecture, considering what a stew he was in about raising a hundred and twenty-five.

He stabled his mule alongside the mare, and, after knocking, was admitted to the *casa* with the same precaution as before. A table and ink were set before him, and a full statement of the case written for the

benefit of the governor and also of the general at Santa Fé. An affidavit by Don Andrés was duly drawn up in Spanish and English, and according to his promise Mr. Backus arrived with the stamp of the San Remo post-office to stamp it. Stephens sealed up the letters, and accompanied him to the door and put them in his hands to be forwarded.

"Them Indians have gone off down the river a mile, to where there's grass, to let their horses feed, and to eat a bite themselves," said the storekeeper; "and I reckon likely they'll be more amiable when they get back here again later on. Anyways, I hope as they will. I told that Mahletonkwa as he'd orter be reasonable." All the time Backus had been in the house he had fawned on Don Nepomuceno in a way that had made Stephens sick when he remembered how he had called him a "close-fisted old hunks" an hour before, and he watched the storekeeper returning to his own abode with a feeling of absolute disgust.

Turning back into the patio he found himself in the presence of Manuelita, who was crossing it on some errand. As all the doors gave on the patio, it acted, so to speak, as the passage by which everybody went from any one room to any other, except where two or three rooms opened into each other *en suite*. "Señorita," he said, "one word with you, if I may. It would really make you very happy, it would make your heart quite free of sorrow, if this money were paid and things settled in that way?"

"Oh, *Madre de Dios!*" she exclaimed, "but can you doubt it for an instant? I would dance for joy"; and her eyes grew brighter on the instant with the thought.

"Very well," answered Stephens cautiously, "I'll

see what can be done. I'll promise you to do my best to bring about a peaceful settlement. I can't say more."

He went back into the sitting-room and wrote a third letter to the cashier of the First National Bank at Santa Fé, where he kept a small balance. He asked the cashier to telegraph to Rockefeller at Denver to say that he, Stephens, was unavoidably detained at Santiago, and to ask Rockefeller to send the thousand dollars to his account at the Santa Fé bank, and he likewise wrote a cordial answer to Rocky's letter, explaining matters at length. As soon as he had finished these he hastened with them to the post-office. The ambulance which brought the mail from Fort Wingate stood before the door, and a fresh team was being harnessed to it, while Mr. Backus was in the act of bringing out the little San Remo mail-bag, and at sight of Stephens stowed it hastily inside.

For the little San Remo mail-bag was all but empty. The two fat letters Stephens had entrusted to him for the governor and the general were not inside it; their thin papery ashes lay amid the glowing coals of the cedar-wood fire on Mr. Backus's kitchen hearth, and had helped to cook the stage-driver's dinner. The impeccable United States postmaster had opened and read them; decided on the spot that he did not want these Navajos interfered with just at present; and had taken this summary method of blocking the game.

"Here's a couple more letters," exclaimed Stephens, running up. "Can't you put them in?" and he held them out to Backus in total ignorance of his perfidy.

"Bag's sealed up now," said the postmaster officially. "Contrary to U. S. regulations to open it again."

Stepens turned instantly to the mail-driver. "I wish you 'd oblige me by posting these for me when you get to Santa Fé. They 're stamped all right."

The driver held out his hand for the letters and shoved them carelessly into the pocket of his overcoat.

"Mind you don't forget to post them," repeated Stephens; "they 're important." At this instant there came into his mind a thing that he had forgotten, so absorbed had he become in the troubles of the Sanchez family. Some stage-driver had libelled him to Sam Argles, and he had intended to find out who it was. Probably this was the man. "Say," he began, "do you remember driving a man named Sam Argles, a miner from Prescott, over this line a month or two back?"

"Can't say, I 'm sure," replied the driver, who was shortening a trace with some difficulty. "You don't suppose as I can remember the names of all the passengers I take?"

"Well, Argles was over this line recently," said Stephens, "and he reports that a driver on it told him something about me."

"Likely he did," said the driver unconcernedly; "like as not, 't war n't me. I aint the only driver on this line."

"Then you deny having told him I was a squawman?" said Stephens.

"Dunno nawthin' about it," replied the driver, gathering up the lines and climbing to his perch. "It 's no concern of mine." But he avoided meeting Stephens's eye.

"Well, so long," said the latter; "I 'm obliged to you about the letters," and without further comment on *the matter* he started back towards the Sanchez house.

"A d—d highfalutin, tonified cuss he is," said Backus as soon as the prospector was out of earshot. "If you was to drop them letters in the Rio Grande it 'd serve him right for bouncing you like that."

"He dursn't say nuthin' to me," said the driver, "or I 'd mash his face in a minute. What do I know about his Sam Argleses? I reckon he is a squawman, aint he?"

"Wal', if he aint, what does he live with them Injuns for? That 's what I say," said Backus with an evil laugh. "And I think, if I was you," he added, "I 'd be apt to have an accident with them letters crossing the Rio Grande."

"There 's a chance for it anyway," said the stage-driver; "the river was rising fast day before yesterday, and I judge 't will be booming by now. I 've got to rustle around, for I 'm going straight across to San Miguel. I can cross there with the mail, anyway. Get up there, mules." He raised the reins, cracked his whip and departed.

CHAPTER XIV

A STERN CHASE

COULD Felipe but have known what the stage-driver knew, that the rise of the river had begun two days ago, he would never have made the sad mistake of taking the straight route to Ensenada. Alas, now, when he and Josefa reached the spot where the ford should have been, his cry, "*Valgame Dios*, the river is up," was only too true. As they passed through the grove of cottonwoods they beheld right from their feet to the farther bank, full a half-mile off, a turbid yellow flood, rolling rapidly southward towards Texas and the Gulf, twelve hundred miles away. All autumn and winter long, a broad expanse of dry water-worn pebbles and boulders, and beds of shingle and sand, through which ran half a dozen easily forded streams of clear water, had been all that lay between La Boca on the west bank and Ensenada on the east. During those seasons both horses and waggons, and people on foot by picking their way through the shallows, could cross almost anywhere without wading much above knee-deep. But all autumn and winter long, on the great mountain ranges of Colorado, two hundred miles away to the north where the river had its sources, the snows of successive storms had been *piled up* deeper and deeper. And now the sun was

well past the vernal equinox, and his growing heat had loosened those snows and was sending their cold floods down ten thousand gulches and tributaries to swell the current of the Rio Grande. This takes place every April, and Felipe ought to have thought of it, but he was young and had not yet learned to think of everything. This was a possibility he had forgotten.

"It must have come down in the last two days," he groaned, as he looked hopelessly at the flood. "I know Juan and Miguel passed here only three days ago from Santa Fé, and it was all right then, and now it is like this."

"We are lost," said Josefa. "What shall we do, Felipe?"—even her brave heart succumbing to this unexpected calamity.

"Don't cry, dear heart, don't cry," said he tenderly, taking her in his arms, and lifting her from the horse. "Perhaps there is a boat. I will go and see." He pulled the bridle from the horse's head. "Do you rest here a minute," he said, spreading his blanket for her to rest her weary limbs, "and let him feed here on the green grass, but don't let him drink. I will run back to La Boca and ask." He threw her the rope, and darted back like the wind in the direction of the houses they had lately passed. The unkempt Mexican was milking a cow in the corral as Felipe dashed up breathless. "Where is the boat?" he asked eagerly. "Is it running? Is it this side?"

"The boat?" said the Mexican slowly, going on with his milking. "No, friend. The river only came down like this yesterday. It was high the day before, but we could still ford it up above. It was yesterday it came down big."

The leisurely manner of the man, and the indefinite-

ness of his reply, were maddening to the excited Indian.

"Yes, but the boat," he almost shouted, "the boat, where is it?"

The Mexican had finished milking his cow, and putting down the milk jar he began to unfasten the raw-hide strap with which her hind legs were tied.

"The boat, friend?" said he; "there is no boat here now. Last year Don Leandro had the boat, but she is hauled up, and they say there is a hole in her. Perhaps he will talk of getting it mended after a while. I suppose the Americano at the mail station in Ensenada will be wanting to send the mail across next week."

"*Valgame Dios!*" cried the boy. "And will there be no way of getting over the river till next week?"

"The water will have run by in a month, or perhaps in three weeks, if God wills it," remarked the Mexican piously; "and then, friend, you can cross without a boat."

"And is there no boat anywhere up or down the river on this side?" exclaimed Felipe. "Is there no way over?"

"There are the Indians at San Miguel, eight leagues below," said the man, proceeding to take down the bars of the corral for the purpose of turning out the cow to pasture. "They have a bridge of single logs to cross on foot by. I do not know if the river will have carried it down. Probably not. They have land on both sides, and are always crossing."

"Eight leagues below!" cried the young Indian in a despairing voice. "And a sandy road from here they say—deep sand, is it not?" He followed the man and the cow outside the corral.

"Yes, friend," said the man, "it is deep sand along the river. But there is a better way : to take the trail to Santiago as far as the Banded Mesa and then turn to the left. So you keep up on the mesas the whole way, and it is better going."

"Thanks, sir ; *adios*," said Felipe ; and without waiting for more discourse he tore along back towards Josefa as fast as he could run.

She was lying on the blanket where he had left her, and holding the end of the lariat. Felipe rushed up to the horse and began to bridle him.

"There is no boat, sweetheart," he panted, "but there is a bridge of the Indians at San Miguel. Let us go there. We can leave the horse with the Indians on this side, and get a horse from some of them on the other, and come on to Ensenada that way. Make haste."

Once more he lifted her to the saddle, and springing up behind her turned the horse's head.

"They must be after us long ago," said he wearily, looking at the sun, which was already well up. "I expect they are half-way here by this time. They will be here in a little while."

"My father will have no horse," suggested Josefa, trying to make the best of it.

"Oh, he will take the Americano's. Don Estevan will lend it to *him*," said Felipe bitterly. "The cacique can take what he wants."

He revolved their position in his mind. If he rode the back trail as far as the Banded Mesa, and there turned off the trail just where it was hard and stony, he would be almost certain to throw the pursuers off the track. But could he reach the Banded Mesa before they got there? That was the question. He con-

sidered it well. It was an up-hill road, and the horse, gallantly as he had carried his double burden, was beginning to flag. He doubted whether to try it did not mean running into the very jaws of the lion. It seemed more hopeful to turn out as soon as they were out of sight of the people at La Boca, and go down parallel to the Rio Grande, trusting to the sand, which was here in drifts almost like the seashore, being so loose that no definite trail of theirs could be traced.

On this idea he acted. But no sooner were they in the deep sand than the tired horse could no longer raise the semblance of a gallop. Felipe sprang off and ran on foot, urging the horse on. Relieved of half his load he went better, but even under the most favourable circumstances the deep sand was very heavy going, and their progress was but slow. Thus they struggled on for two weary miles, and Felipe kept uttering words of encouragement to his mistress, whose silence proclaimed her sinking spirits ; but all the time his eyes kept turning in the direction of the Santiago trail, for every moment he expected their pursuers to appear.

Suddenly on the brow of the topmost of the low, rolling hills that rose between the Rio Grande and the mesas, his keen sight discerned a black speck, which he knew had not been there a minute before. In the clear air of New Mexico, and over those bare, open downs far-off things are seen with amazing distinctness ; but at that distance it was impossible to say for certain what it was. Felipe said nothing of it to Josefa ; what was the use of adding unnecessarily to her terrors. He kept his eye vigilantly on the object of his suspicions.

"It is no use to try to hide," said he to himself.
"*There is n't cover enough among these scattering*

juniper bushes to hide a sheep. If it is a man he can see us as plain as we do him, and he will know what we are by our actions. If it is a cow or a horse feeding, it will move slowly about; if it is a man riding, he will move straight on in a minute or two, and then I shall know."

His uncertainty did not last long. Before five minutes elapsed the speck moved again, and this time it descended the hill straight towards the fugitives, till it was lost to sight behind the brow of a nearer ridge. There was no longer any doubt left in Felipe's mind.

"*Ay de mi!*" said he to his mistress, "we are pursued. It is one man only, as far as I can see. It must be your father," and he urged the horse on freshly.

"Run, run, Felipe!" said the girl. "Hide yourself somewhere! He will kill you if he catches us. Never mind me. He won't kill me, you know."

"No, not that! I can't do that!" he cried; but dark despair came over him. His feet seemed like lead as he struggled forward. He looked over his shoulder again. The black speck had reappeared again much closer and much larger; it was a galloping horseman. His last hope fled. "There he comes!" he cried—and he seized the horse's bridle, and, turning him to the left, headed him straight for the Rio Grande, which was but a few hundred yards away.

"What are you doing? Where are you going, Felipe?" exclaimed Josefa, troubled at this sudden change of direction and at the sudden fury of his face.

"Where am I going?" he echoed bitterly. "Don Estevan told me yesterday that I must come to the Rio Grande to find water enough to drown myself, and I am going to see."

They came near the brink of the rushing river. Be-

hind them the galloping horseman was fast closing up the gap that separated them. Felipe recognised his style of riding. "It is your father! see!" he cried in a voice of despair, "but he sha'n't separate us now," and he urged the horse towards the water's edge.

"Oh stop, Felipe, stop! What madness is this?" cried the girl, and she drew rein and pulled up. Felipe seized the bridle, his face aflame with baffled passion.

"Loose the rein!" he cried to her desperately. "Let the horse come on. He will carry you over. I can swim."

"Oh, you are mad!" said she, gazing on the wide rolling flood and the distant shore beyond. "Don't dream of such a thing. We shall both be drowned."

"Well, let us drown, then; we shall be together," he exclaimed passionately. "Give him the rein. Come on. Better that than to be beaten like dogs and separated." As he spoke he looked over his shoulder and saw that Salvador, his face raging with anger, was within a few yards of them. Felipe raised his arm to strike Josefa's horse, and force him to take the desperate plunge into the boiling current.

The desperate plunge was never taken. A shot cracked. Felipe felt a great blow, and his right arm fell powerless to his side. Salvador was close by with a smoking pistol in his hand. Josefa's terrified horse wheeled round and bounded away in terror from the bank of the dreaded river. Salvador dashed in between her and Felipe and fired at him again. Felipe hardly knew if he was hit again or not, but instinctively he ran off some fifty yards and then stopped. Wounded and weaponless, what could he do against the murderous firearm in the hands of the cacique?

"Yes, run, you villain, you scoundrel!" shouted

Salvador. "Run, and don't stop within a hundred leagues of me! If ever I catch you near the village again I'll kill you—I will," and he poured forth a torrent of abuse at the wretched youth who stood there on the river's bank the very picture of misery, the blood running down his right arm and dropping from his hand to the ground. Josefa saw him, and overcome with pity and fear for him turned her horse towards him, but the animal, dreading the water, refused to approach it.

Salvador rode up to her and seized her rein. "Ah, traitress, ungrateful, disobedient!" hissed his angry voice. "I'll settle with you for this piece of work, be sure." And leaving Felipe he started away from the river, dragging the horse and its rider after him across the sand-dunes.

The horse followed not unwillingly, but too slowly for Salvador's impatience. He dropped the rein, pulled his horse behind, and striking the other violently with his whip forced him into a gallop. The position was a tempting one to his passion, and the cruel rawhide fell once and again, not on the horse only but also on his rider. The girl uttered no sound and made no resistance, only she bent forward over the animal's neck before the shower of blows. At this pitiful sight her lover gave a great cry of despair and started forward to the rescue, wounded and unarmed as he was. But bleeding, exhausted, and on foot, it was hopeless for him to attempt to overtake the horses. He made one despairing rush with all his failing strength, then he fell headlong and lay senseless on the sand.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROD DESCENDS

THE cacique made straight for the pueblo, driving his wretched prisoner before him. The poor girl, sick at heart and stupefied with grief and fatigue, picturing to herself Felipe dead of his wounds or drowning himself in his despair, submitted unresistingly to the blows and the reproaches of her father. He was the stronger ; how could she resist ? She let herself be driven back like a strayed beast of burden over the same leagues of burning mesa and sandy ravine that she had traversed in the coolness of the night under the silence of the stars. Then she had her lover's arms round her and his voice whispering words of love in her ear ; now she shrank before bitter curses and the stinging lash. Yet never did she open her lips to utter a word in self-defence or a plea for pardon. Only she kept saying over and over to herself in time to the hoof-beats of the horse, " He may beat me, he may kill me, but Ignacio I won't have." Even sunk in misery as she was, she found a surprising comfort in steeling herself to endure, and swearing to be true to herself and to Felipe.

There is a limit to the staying powers of even the toughest of Indian ponies, and by the time the cacique and his captive had covered half the distance back to

Santiago, the horse of the storekeeper which he was mounted upon, and his own which carried his daughter, were both showing painful signs of exhaustion. The cacique, unwilling to run the risk of injuring his own animal, left the trail and made for a spring that he knew of a few miles off to one side, near the foot of the mountains, where they found both water and grass. Here, in a sullen silence, they remained, till long after the sun had set and the weary day ended. The cacique was nursing his wrath till he should have got her safely home again, when he would make an example of her. Not till the Great Bear had sunk well below the pole did they remount their now rested steeds and set out once more for the pueblo ; it was grey dawn when they came in sight of it at last, and presently the well-known step-like outline of the terraced roofs of Santiago showed sharp and clear among the peach orchards ahead of them. As they entered its precincts they passed through quite a crowd of onlookers ; they had been observed descending from the mesas, and natural curiosity had brought numbers to see the excitement. Poor Josefa dropped her head in shame to escape the hard, inquisitive looks.

They stopped at her father's door. He pulled her roughly from the saddle, pushed her inside, and giving the horses to two of the boys, he entered after her, shut the door, and bolted it. He advanced towards her with glowing eyes. The blows he had given her on the road had only whetted his passion. " Now, you she-devil," said he, " I 'll teach you to run away from me."

He flung her to the ground and stood over her. The cruel rawhide descended again and again. The eager crowd outside was squeezing up against the door and the little close-barred lattice window, anxious to see as

much as possible of the exciting scene inside. They had no notion of interfering. On the contrary, it seemed to them entirely natural that a father should chastise his disobedient daughter. "If he did n't, who was to?"—that was the way they would have put it.

Among the crowd was Tito. Tito was a friend of Felipe's, and what was a source of curiosity to others was maddening to him. There came into his mind the thought of the American, and he resolved to call him to the rescue.

Stephens, after despatching his letters, as he believed, on the previous day, had returned to the house of Don Nepomuceno. He had done all he could to set the proper authorities in motion, and now, finding that the Navajos had taken themselves off and not returned, so that it was impossible to go on with the negotiations, he took his leave of the Sanchez family and hastened back to the pueblo. The more he thought of the fury the cacique had displayed in the morning, the more uneasy he felt as to what might happen when he should overtake Felipe and Josefa. But when he learnt, on his arrival, that nothing further was known since the cacique had galloped away on their tracks, he settled in his mind that no news was good news, and waited quietly for matters to develop themselves. He rose before dawn the following morning, only to be told once more that nothing had been heard of the fugitives or of the cacique, and he was now busy wiping out his rifle, when there came a hasty knock at the door, and, forgetful of the bulldog, Tito burst headlong into the room. "Oh, Don Estevan!" he exclaimed breathlessly, "Salvador is back, and he is beating his daughter like fury. Perhaps he will kill her."

"The dickens you say!" said the American, drop-

ping his work abruptly and making for the door.
"Where 's Felipe?"

"I don't know," answered Tito. "He 's not there. Perhaps the cacique has killed him."

Tito knew nothing of the sort, but the temptation to deepen the shadows of a harrowing tale is quite irresistible.

"Where are they?" said Stephens, as soon as they were in the open air.

"Here, in his house," cried Tito eagerly, leading the way.

Stephens paused and stood irresolute. "After all, it 's none of my funeral," growled he to himself. "I have n't any call to interfere. And I have n't got any weapon on me neither." He turned back to get his pistol, but paused again. "No," he said, "I don't want it. Maybe I sha'n't do anything, and if I do, I 'd better go through on my nerve." He knew that an appeal to physical force was idle where the odds were one against a hundred, and that his only chance lay in moral influence.

He followed Tito. It was plain enough where the scene was taking place by the crowd at the door. Stephens went up. The sound of blows was audible from inside, but no cry was heard from the victim. "Where are the chiefs? Where are Tostado and Benito and the rest?" he asked. He would gladly have had the support of the seniors of the village, but they were much too dignified to appear at this performance. The mob consisted of boys, young men, and some of the poorer and less well-thought-of people.

No one answered Stephens's question. He listened; the blows continued. "He can't be allowed to murder her," he cried. "The whole pueblo will get into a row

with Government if that happens." He collared two or three boys out of the press. "Here you, Jose, Tomas, Juan Antonio, run and fetch Tostado here and the other chiefs. Say I want them to come."

The boys obeyed him ; and the American, squeezing into the gap he had made in the crowd, knocked loudly at the door. There was no answer to the knock, but the blows stopped. He knocked again, calling, "Hullo, Salvador ! Hullo there !"

"Look out, Don Estevan," called out some of the boys. "He 's furious. Maybe he 'll go for you."

He listened for an answer, but none was given. Then came the sound of the whip again. Stephens shouted again, but in vain. He looked round for the chiefs. There was no sign of any of them yet.

"I can't stand this any longer," said he. "Give me room, you fellows." He stood back four or five feet from the door, and raising his right foot dashed it against the lock.

The fastenings were old and the door flew open. He stepped over the threshold and entered. The crowd behind him hung back. In the middle of the floor, full length on her face, lay the form of Josefa. Her arms were bare ; she had thrown them up to protect her head, and the marks of the whip were only too visible. She lay perfectly silent and still, a slight quivering of her limbs alone showing that she was alive. The Indian stood across her with his uplifted whip in his hand. He glared fiercely at the American who advanced towards him.

Stephens did not meet the cacique's eye. He was looking down at the prostrate figure on the ground. "So you 've brought her back, Salvador," he remarked in an unruffled, every-day voice.

"Yes, I have," he replied brutally; "and I've given her something to keep her from ever running away again."

"It looks like it," said Stephens.

He took one hand out of his pocket, stooped down, and felt her head. "It looks like she'd never run anywhere again," he said.

He did not really believe that she was killed, but he thought it politic to assume so. His position placed him absolutely at the mercy of the Indian; but his voice, his manner, and his action conveyed the assumption that it was absolutely impossible that the Indian should dream of attacking him.

His coolness succeeded. The cacique lowered his whip and stepped back, while Stephens moved the girl's arms gently from her head. They fell limp on the earthen floor.

Stephens had seen some wild doings in Californian mining towns, but he never had seen a woman beaten in his life. Those limp arms sent a queer thrill through him. A sudden fury rose within him, but he mastered it. He felt her head all over slowly and carefully to see if the skull was fractured—as indeed it might well have been had she been struck with the loaded whip-handle. This gave him time to think of his next move.

"If you've killed her, you'll be hanged for it, Salvador," he said at last, in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone. "You and she are not citizens, but you'll be hanged all the same. The law of the Americans reaches here; understand that."

The Indian, whose passion was really more under control than seemed to be the case, was somewhat cowed at Stephens's deliberate statement, but he re-

joined sullenly, "She's not dead. Lashes don't kill."

"You will have to answer for it if she dies," said Stephens getting up. He had satisfied himself that the girl was not seriously injured.

"Not to you then," said the Indian, his courage reviving, when he realised that the threat was, after all, blank cartridge, seeing that the girl was alive. He tried to work himself into a rage again. "What do you break into my house for and interfere with me? I'll do what I like with my own." He stepped forward close to Stephens, between him and Josefa. "Go out, or I'll kill you!" he said, raising his voice to a tone of fury.

For a moment the American paused, uncertain. The Indian was a powerful man, full as big and strong as himself, well armed with knife, pistol, and loaded whip, to say nothing of his fifty friends outside the door.

The hesitation was momentary. "I can't leave this girl to that brute's mercy," he said to himself. "Perhaps I can back him down."

He looked Salvador square in the eyes. "Where's Felipe?" said he calmly. "You must answer for him, too. Have you killed him?"

"None of your business," said the Indian roughly. "Be off!" and he raised his hand.

At this moment Josefa, hitherto as still as a corpse, turned her face from the floor, but without rising. She looked up at Stephens. "He gave him two shots," she said, in a voice wonderfully steady considering the pain she was enduring. "I saw him fall."

"Then I arrest you for the murder of Felipe. You are my prisoner. Give up your arms."

The only answer the cacique made to this demand

was to take out his revolver, but instead of surrendering it he thrust the muzzle in Stephens's face, cocking it as he did so.

The steady gaze of the American met, without quailing, the black, flashing eyes of the Indian. Grey eyes against black, white man against red, the strife is as old as the history of the continent they stood upon ; perhaps it will last as long.

"You can kill me, I know, of course," said the American, speaking very slowly and distinctly ; "but you can't kill all the soldiers of the Government. You may kill me to-day, but to-morrow the soldiers will come from Santa Fé and take you prisoner ; and if you make your people resist they will destroy you. The Navajos were twenty thousand, but the soldiers conquered them. You are only three hundred. They will conquer you and take you away as they did the Navajos, as they did the Jicarillas, as they have done the Modocs." He raised his left hand very gently and took hold of the pistol barrel. "Don't destroy your people, Salvador," he continued. "You know I wish them well. Loose it."

The Indian's grasp relaxed ; he drew a deep breath and stepped back. Stephens lowered the pistol to his own right hand, muzzle upwards, uncocked it, and placed it in his waist-belt.

"Now come with me to my room," said he, taking him gently but firmly by the arm. The struggle for the mastery was over ; the Indian had yielded ; he obeyed unresistingly. As they stepped out of the house, Stephens said to Tito, "Tell the women to see to the girl."

Outside they found Tostado and the other chiefs approaching—not too fast. It was very plain that they

did not want to interfere in the matter. Stephens took his man towards them.

"Look here, Tostado," said he as soon as they met, "I have arrested Salvador for shooting Felipe. I am going to take him to Santa Fé, to the agent and to the governor. Now I want some of you to go along and see that it is all right and square."

Stephens had been reflecting during the course of the night on the events of the previous day, and it had occurred to him that accidents did sometimes happen, and that his letters to the governor and the general might possibly go astray. He had no special reason to suspect what Mr. Backus had actually done, but he had a general feeling of uneasiness with regard to the San Remo post-office. The idea had been already in his mind to go to Santa Fé and lay the affair of the Navajos before the authorities in person, and now this difficult matter of the arrest of the cacique was a double reason for doing it.

The Indians began to converse among themselves.

"Come along to my room, then, and talk it over," said Stephens, and he went ahead with his prisoner, reluctantly followed by the chiefs.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FEE IS ACCEPTED

THE whole party came into Stephens's room and settled themselves round the wall on the floor, much as they had done the night before. Stephens seated his prisoner on a stool in the middle, and taking the cacique's revolver from his belt laid it on the table. As he did so, he drew the attention of Tostado, who was next to him, to the two recently discharged chambers in the cylinder. "Those were the shots," said he.

"Maybe so, Don Estevan," answered the Indian suavely. "Doubtless you are right in what you say, as you always are. We know that your honour is very wise and very just. But before we do anything about it we want to know what Salvador has to say; we have not heard him yet."

"I do not want to conceal anything," said the cacique abruptly. "I saw them from the top of the hill that leads down from the mesas to La Boca. I went straight to the river to them. He was on foot driving my horse, trying to drive him into the river. I fired at him once, twice. He ran away and stopped. I took my horse and my daughter, and I brought them home. He ran after us, but he fell down. I saw him lying there the last thing from the hill. If he is dead, he is dead. I do not know any more."

His story was so straightforward and simple that it was convincing.

"Where did you say all this happened?" asked Stephens.

"On the river, down below La Boca a league," answered the Indian.

The chiefs began to question him about the details of the affair. He described to them the position of the fugitives when he overtook them, and the refusal of the terrified horse to enter the swollen river.

"Then Felipe was not riding your horse," observed Stephens, who was listening, for in deference to him they spoke in Spanish for the time being.

"No, he was on foot. He was driving the horse," was the reply of the cacique.

"I suppose your daughter was on the horse?" said Stephens.

"Yes, he was taking them both along," answered the Indian.

"How old is she?" asked the prospector. "She looks almost a woman grown."

The Indian reflected a little while. "She was a little child so high," he answered at last, "when there was the great war in the States," and he held his hand at a height to indicate a child of ten years old.

"She must be eighteen now, then," said Stephens.

"I suppose so. Yes, if you say so," admitted the Indian.

"Then she is not a child," said Stephens, "and she can marry him or anyone she likes. You have no right to prevent her. Understand that. This is a free country. By the law a woman is as free as a man; she may go where she likes and marry whom she likes. She *is not a slave*, and don't you think any such thing.

No American can strike a woman ; that is the deepest of shames."

He paused after this, for him, unusually long speech, which was intended quite as much for the benefit of the other Indians as the cacique. The American felt a little elated at the thought that single-handed he had been able to arrest their cacique in their midst, and he could not resist improving the occasion.

There was a minute's silence, and then Tostado fixed his keen black eyes on the American's face. "Listen to me, Señor Don Estevan," he said. "The Americans have their way; that is good for them. The Mexicans have their way; that is good for them. And the wild Indians,—the Utes, and the Comanches, and the Navajos too,—they have their own ways. And we, we have our laws. We don't change them. I know if one Indian kills another, then the law of the Americans is to judge him; but the rest of the things we manage among ourselves. The Government gives us that right. We have our own alcalde. We have our own customs. And when men and women do wrong together we beat them. Then they are afraid. That is why our women are so good. Not like the Mexicans. That is good for us. We do not want to change."

"But," cried Stephens, "if it is your custom to beat the women like dogs, you ought to change it. Everybody knows that that it is shameful."

"For the Americans," said the old Indian, with the air of a man making an extremely reasonable concession, "I do not say anything. Let them have their ways, and treat their women as seems good to them. So they are content; that is right. But we have our ways; we do not want to change; we are content to be as we are."

Stephens felt nonplused. It seemed to him that he was not much of a success as a missionary on the rights of women, and he felt, too, that in this discussion he had wandered from the main point. After all, he had arrested his man for the murder of Felipe, and not for beating his daughter, though his motive in doing so had been to rescue the helpless woman.

"You have heard Salvador's story," he said to the chiefs abruptly. "Suppose we go and hear that of the witness, if she is able to speak."

They assented at once, and Stephens, bidding Salvador himself remain where he was, led the way. On arriving at the house, they found the girl laid on some skins in an inner room. Stephens went into the room and knelt down beside her, the others remaining beyond the open door.

She opened her eyes, and perceiving who it was gave him a meaning look. "You have saved me once," she whispered; "can you save me again? *She* is making poison for me. I have seen"; and her eyes turned towards her step-mother, who was mixing something in a gourd at the end of the room.

Stephens gave a low whistle. "This is a queer business," he muttered to himself. "I wonder if the girl's telling lies. Maybe she's off her nut. Likely enough, after such a hammering. The old woman does n't look such a bad lot. After all," he went on thinking, "perhaps I had better get her away. These folks can be pretty low-down when they try."

"Can you move?" said he to the girl. "Can you walk?"

"Yes," she answered; "I am quite strong. Only I am looking how to escape."

Neither fatigue, nor bodily pain, nor mental torture,

had robbed her of her senses, or tamed her spirit. Since the blows which she had endured with such stoical courage had ceased, she had been collecting herself, conquering the pain, and trying to think. She had recognised a friend in the touch of Stephens's hand, and in the tones of his voice. She had made up her mind to appeal to him if possible for aid, and now here he was at her side.

"Can you take me away?" she whispered.

"All right," he answered. "I'll see what I can do."

"Probably," he mused, "they will say all sorts of ugly, low-down things about me for this, but I can't leave her here at the mercy of these woman-beaters, and that's all there is to it. If I can take two or three of the principal men along, I don't see why she should n't come to Santa Fé with us, if she's up to it; but I don't want any more confounded scandal than I can help."

He got up and went to the door and addressed Tostado. "She is able to get up, and to talk," he said. "It will be best to have her come over to my room there and hear what she has to say."

They assented. The American felt all through that though the chiefs did not directly oppose him, their feeling was against him. He led the way, and they followed reluctantly. Josefa, a blanket thrown over her, and drawn over her head so as to conceal her face all but the eyes, accompanied Stephens, but so stiffly and painfully did she walk from the effects of the violence she had suffered, that the idea of her being able to undertake a journey became out of the question.

They entered the American's room, and sat down as before, the girl sitting on the ground near the fire-

place. She answered the questions put to her in a low but firm voice.

Her statement tallied exactly with the cacique's. She had seen her lover's blood flow, and the last she had seen of him as she looked back was his figure stretched on the sand. After hearing her evidence, Stephens felt no doubt that Felipe had been murdered.

"I must secure her somehow," he said to himself. "She 'll be wanted as a witness. I suppose his confession alone won't be enough. And she certainly believes the cacique's wife 'll kill her if I leave her there. She aint fit to go to Santa Fé, and it would be simply brutal to ask it of her. No, I 'll have to try another plan. The only way to save her is to have them acknowledge that I have the right to protect her."

"Tostado," said he, addressing the fine old man whose wisdom and force of character made him by far the most influential of the chiefs, "you told me just now that you had your own customs that you did not want ever to change."

"Yes, señor," said he.

"Well, it is your custom, is it not, that an unmarried woman belongs to her father, and that he can give her to anyone he pleases?"

"Yes," said Tostado; "that is, he can give her to any man in the pueblo that is not of her family. But we should not allow him to give her to any man in another pueblo. We do not allow the women of Santiago to go away."

"Well," continued Stephens, "last night when I had blasted the ditch for you, you all came here and wanted me to stay with you always; and you said that everything you had was mine, and that whatever I asked you for you would give me. Is not that so?"

"Yes," said Tostado simply. "You speak the truth." A general murmur of assent confirmed his statement.

"Now," said Stephens, "I'm going to ask you for something, and I shall see whether Indians mean a thing when they say it. I ask you for the daughter of Salvador—for Josefa."

There was a general movement of surprise. The Indians talked eagerly to one another, but in their own language, so that they were unintelligible to the American. Presently Tostado spoke.

"How do you mean?" said he, addressing Stephens. "As your wife?"

"As wife, as servant, as anything I like," he answered. "You say now she belongs to Salvador. I want her to belong to me."

The Indians again conversed among themselves.

"But she's promised to Ignacio," said her father to the others. "The padre's coming to-morrow."

"That makes no odds," said one. "Ignacio does n't want her now she has run off with Felipe."

"It does n't make any difference if he does," said another. "He's a cowardly old creature; he won't do anything."

"Give him another daughter," said a third, "instead. One that won't run away," he added in an aside for the benefit of the rest. "Perhaps he will give you six cows if you warrant her to stop." The three cows of old Ignacio's bargain were no secret in the pueblo.

The general opinion seemed to be that after the affair of last night both Salvador and Ignacio would be well rid of Josefa on any terms.

"Besides," said the first speaker, with a meaning

look towards the American, "if he really wants her, so much the better for you. He will be as good as your son-in-law. He will never give you up to the agent and the governor then. Much better do it at once."

Salvador rose from his seat, and going towards the fireplace took the girl by the shoulder.

"Come here," said he.

She winced at his touch, but she got up and obeyed him. He took her to the American. "Here she is," he said aloud before them all. "I give her to you. Keep her and do what you like with her. From now on she is not mine any longer but yours."

"Do you all agree to that," said Stephens, turning to the chiefs.

"Yes," was the reply. "Yes; it is good."

Stephens turned to the crowd who were peeping in at the door. "Tell Reyna I want her, some of you," said he.

In a minute the old squaw was fetched, and pushed, looking rather sheepish and surprised, into the middle of the room. While she was coming, Stephens had disappeared into the inner room and now came out again with some bags in his hands.

"Look here, Reyna," he began. "They have given Josefa to me. She belongs to me now. I want you to take care of her for me. I'll pay you for your trouble. Here is flour and meat and coffee and sugar for the present."

Reyna was taken aback, and looked shyly round at the company. The Indians at once confirmed what Stephens had told her. She took the bags from his hands, and made her way out again through the crowded doorway with a queer look on her puzzled

face. She did not quite know what this unaccountable American was up to.

Stephens followed her with the girl. They entered the house of Reyna together.

"You will be quite safe here with her," he said in a kindly voice. "I'll see that you come to no harm."

The girl turned to him to thank him, but no words would come. She was fairly worn out with the strain of this last trying scene, added to her fatigue and cruel anxiety about Felipe's fate.

"Here, Reyna," said the prospector, noticing her condition, "this girl's about played out. You had better see to her at once," and turning on his heel he left the house, closing the door carefully behind him.

As soon as he was outside he looked closely at the group of young men. "Tito," he called.

Tito came to him, and they walked together a little apart from the rest. "Look here, Tito," began Stephens, "I've got a job for you. I know you are a friend of Felipe's. I want you to go and look for him. Take my little mule and put your saddle on him. Go over to the Rio Grande and look along near the river about a league below La Boca. If you find him dead, get a man from there to help you with the body. If he's only wounded, have him taken care of, or bring him back if you can. Tell him he need not be afraid now. Here's two dollars for expenses. Mind you get some corn for the mule at La Boca. Off with you as soon as you can."

Tito did not need telling twice. "I'll do just what you say, Don Estevan," he said, as he stowed the money in a little pouch on his belt, and away he flew like the wind.

The American returned to his own house. He found Tostado awaiting him at the door. The other chiefs had disappeared. Salvador's wife had come with food which she had prepared for her husband.

"It was time for breakfast, Don Estevan," explained Tostado, "and they have gone home. The woman has brought Salvador's here."

"He could have eaten with me for all that," said Stephens, "but we had n't decided about who was to go to Santa Fé with me. Will you?"

"Well, I have no horse here, Don Estevan," said the old man. "After breakfast we will see about it."

"Very well," said Stephens in a grumbling tone. "I suppose we must wait their pleasure. It is n't much running off to breakfast there 'd be if it was anything they wanted to do."

However, there was nothing to do but wait, and Stephens had plenty of time to do his own cooking in the interval. It was nearly an hour before the chiefs were reassembled—having, indeed, to be sent for by Stephens individually; but by persistence he got them together at last and proceeded to business.

"Now, friends," he began, "who is going with me to Santa Fé? Don't all speak at once," he added in English for his own benefit, smiling grimly as he saw the blank look on their faces as he renewed his unwelcome proposal.

"Will you go, Benito?" he said, determined to press them one by one.

The Indian instead of replying conversed rapidly with the others. They had hoped that the transfer of Josefa to Stephens might have modified the American's absurd passion for what he considered to be justice.

"Look here, Don Estevan," began Benito, "it is

better to wait. To-morrow, when Tito gets back, then——”

“Oh, nonsense!” broke in Stephens impatiently, “Tito may n’t be back for a week, and it makes no odds about him anyhow.”

“But,” interrupted Ramon, another of the chiefs, “we have got no horses here. You have your own mare, and the mule for Salvador, but we have none. When Tito comes back with your other mule——”

“Oh, Tito be bothered!” said the American. “I tell you we don’t want him.”

Suddenly there was a shout outside. A Mexican rider came tearing up the village, and reined his reeking horse on to his haunches at Stephens’s door. Flakes of bloody foam flew from the bit, and the horseman’s rowels were red. He sprang into the room, covered with sweat and dust from the road.

“The Señorita Sanchez!” he exclaimed breathlessly, “the Señorita Sanchez has been carried off by the Navajos in the night.” All present leapt to their feet.

“What!” cried Stephens, “Manuelita?” He stood aghast.

“Yes,” repeated the Mexican; “the Señorita Manuelita Sanchez is in the hands of those villains.”

“Of that Mahletonkwa!” the American exclaimed, seizing his rifle; “but how? and where are they?”

“*Quien sabe?*” said the Mexican, “*esperate, Don Estevan*; wait a moment, señor, till I tell you,” for Stephens had caught up his saddle and was making for the door. “All we know is that she is gone; the tracks of the Navajos are all round the house and on the roof, and it is guessed that they entered so, in the night, while everybody was asleep, and carried her off.”

"What idiots!" exclaimed Stephens. "Why did n't they keep a watch?"

"Who could have dreamed of such an attempt?" replied the Mexican. "The doors were fastened safe. No one thought of their getting over the roof. But it is proved that they must have done so; their moccasin tracks are there on the roof to show it. And they have fled with her to the westward; the tracks of their horses go all up the valley of the Agua Negra. They have got a long start. But Don Nepomuceno and Don Andrés have raised a party; they have got all the men they could in San Remo and gone on their trail: they are hoping to overtake them."

"Can I catch up with them?" asked Stephens hoarsely. "By George! but I wish I had stayed down there last night; but how could I or anyone have imagined such a thing as this? Poor, poor girl!"

He forgot the cacique, his prisoner for having shot down Felipe; he forgot Josefa, lying there next door dependent on his protection; for the moment all these things vanished from his mind before this dreadful catastrophe.

"Yes," answered the Mexican, "you will be able to catch them—they have but an hour's start of you; you will, that is, if you can follow their trail, for you have a good mare. But what they want you to do—what I came here to say, what Don Nepomuceno begged me to urge on you—is to bring with you some of these Indians of the pueblo to assist him in following the trail of the Navajos. Our friends here of Santiago did good service as trailers for Coronel Christophero Carson during the war against the Navajos; Don Nepomuceno is sure they will follow you, too, against the Navajos if you will ask them."

Stephens paused and pondered a moment. His first impulse had been to mount at once and gallop straight in pursuit. But there was wisdom in Don Nepomuceno's counsel ; most assuredly the Indians would be invaluable if they came, and clearly there was nothing else he could do that would be half so useful as to bring them. And with reflection came back the image of the helpless Josefa, and he instantly realised that if he could take the cacique along with him her position would become ever so much safer; for he could not be blind to the fact that as soon as he was gone she might yet be in danger supposing that the cacique remained behind. Yes, in every way it would be better to enlist the cacique for the pursuit ; he decided to try and do so on the spot.

"This is a shocking thing that the Navajos have done," he said to the Indians around him, "and they will have to smart for it. You have all heard the suggestion made by this gentleman," he looked at the Mexican as he spoke, "and I entirely agree with it. Cacique, will you and a party of your warriors come with me on the war-trail against these scoundrels? You will do a public service if you can succeed in recovering the señorita from them ; and in that case, whatever you may have done to Felipe, the rescue of the captive would count for much in your favour. In short, Cacique, if you will render good service in recovering her, I will appeal to the governor to pardon you. There is my offer."

The Indians talked it over rapidly among themselves. All joined in urging Salvador to seize the opportunity given him of escaping from the consequences of his rash act. Nor did he want much urging; he had fought the Navajos before, and was personally

no ways loath to take the field against them again, and pride made him ardently desire to shine before his people in the character of a leader. In five minutes the matter was settled among them and his companions selected.

"Yes, Don Estevan," said he, "your offer is accepted. I will go with you on the trail of these Navajos, and I will take with me Miguel, who is our best tracker, and Alejandro, who is very good also. And it is agreed that you stand my friend in the matter of Felipe."

"Agreed," cried Stephens; "and now let us be off. You have weapons and ammunition."

"My horse is tired," said the cacique; "and how about horses for the young men?"

"My mule can carry one," said Stephens. "Could we have your horse, señor," he asked, turning to the Mexican, "and let you ride Mr. Backus's horse back to San Remo?—for I presume he is n't fit for another journey, either."

"Alas," said the Mexican politely, "I fear I cannot accommodate you in this. I have to ride now post-haste to Rio Grande and warn Don Nepomuceno's friends there of the trouble that has befallen him. They will doubtless send a party from there also on the trail. Were it not for that I would ride with you myself with pleasure."

"Look, now," interrupted the cacique, "at the plan which I propose. Let us go to the horse herd beyond the Cerro de las Viboras. My horse is tired indeed, but he can take me there; your mule is strong, Sooshiuamo,"—he took the first opportunity to call Stephens by his Indian name as a sign of renewed amity,—*"let him carry our two young men also as far as the*

herd ; when we get to the herd we will choose fresh horses for each of us, and we will take one of the herders along with us, young Ignacio, who is very clever at trailing, and knows the country ; and besides, it is possible that the herders may have seen something of Mahletonkwa's band, and can give information. In any case we will start afresh from the horse herd and cut the trail of Mahletonkwa, and perhaps of Don Nepomuceno's party a good way off from here." Stephens looked up doubtfully at this suggestion. " Oh, never fear," continued the cacique boastingly, " we can leave a trail and find it again ; I will show you what our men are like as trailers. There is no one equal to the Santiago men on a trail."

The cacique was known for a man of skill and resource in all these things of practical importance. He had indeed aroused the indignation of the prospector by his cruelty to Felipe and to his daughter, but in that after all he did but act according to his nature ; Indians were cruel anyhow. The savage, even in the best of them, was close to the surface. When it came to going on the war-path the value of the peculiar powers of the savage was manifest, and Stephens felt satisfied with his own action in turning them to a good purpose. The cacique's proposal was unquestionably sound, and he accepted it without hesitation.

" Tell me," he said, " before you go," turning to the Mexican who had brought the news, and was standing there, quirt in hand, ready to start as soon as their plans were decided upon, " what more is there known about this matter ? "

" *Pues, nada, señor,*" answered the young man—" nothing—absolutely nothing. We know neither at what hour of the night they took her away, nor with

what object they have done it, but it is doubtless to extort the money from her father, the money that they have been demanding for the Navajo killed by Don Andrés."

"Does the postmaster know anything about it?" asked Stephens; "I thought he acted very ill yesterday with regard to the Indians. If he's had any hand in it, by George! ——" he broke off with a sudden fury of suspicion.

"Nothing is known either about him, señor," replied the Mexican; "Mr. Backus declares that he had no idea of their doing such a thing. They were at his store during the afternoon, but they went off again to a distance to camp before sunset. Doubtless they would conceal their scheme from him as from everybody else. And now, señor, with your permission I am for the road. I have near twenty leagues to ride to-day. I report, then, to all my friends that you, with the Indian trailers of Santiago, are going to take the trail. Believe me, we relied on you confidently to assist." He grasped Stephens hand warmly, sprang to his saddle, and was presently galloping for the Rio Grande.

The Indians ran to their houses for their guns and for the provision of dried meat and parched maize they would require for the journey, while Stephens brought his mare to the door and saddled her, tying a blanket for himself on behind, and filling his saddle-bags with as much victuals as he could stuff into them. Before starting he ran into Reyna's house to take one look at Josefa. She was lying on a rug spread on the ground. In a few words he told her of his summons to pursue Mahletonkwa, and his acceptance of the cacique's services for the purpose. "But don't you be afraid,"

he continued; "you're all right now. He shall never lay his hand on you again. Reyna will look after you, and nurse you, and feed you. You just stick by her as if she was your mother. And if anyone tries to bother you while I'm gone, you just tell them to go to blazes. You tell them that you belong to me now, and that if they go to try any nonsense on with you I'll know the reason why. They'll have me to reckon with. See? That's my talk, and don't you forget it." He gave her limp hand a reassuring pressure as she lay there, and turned away. Three minutes later he was riding north-westward from the pueblo in the company of Salvador, Miguel, and Alejandro.

CHAPTER XVII

MADAM WHAILAHAY

NO sooner had they reached the outskirts of the village than they saw a man on foot, whose dress proclaimed him to be a white man, approaching from the San Remo direction, not by the road, but by a path that led through the plough-lands. They turned aside to meet him, and as he drew nearer it proved to be no other than Mr. Backus himself.

"You'd better go ahead," said Stephens to his three Indian companions as he reined up his mare in order to speak to him. "I'll catch you up in a few minutes, but I just want to hear if he knows anything"; and they rode forward accordingly.

"This is a devil of a business," he began abruptly, addressing the storekeeper, "and I should like to hear what you've got to say about it." His lips closed tightly, and there was a dangerous light shining in his eyes.

"Ah, about the carrying off of the Sanchez girl," said Backus, with a nervous affectation of taking it all rather lightly; "well, yes, it is a devil of a business, as you say; it's the impidentest thing as ever I heard of. Who ever saw the like of it?"

"It's a serious matter, I'd have you to know," returned the prospector with rapidly rising anger; "it's

a dreadful thing for a woman to be carried off by these infernal scoundrels, and for you of all men to speak lightly of it is nothing less than an outrage. You mark my words." He was exceedingly indignant with this man for his previous conduct, and that he should assume a flippant tone now was unbearable.

"Wal', I 'm sorry, real sorry about it, of course," said Backus; "and it 's spoilt our little game we had on for getting that information out of them Navajos, for the present anyway."

"I 'll trouble you not to talk about 'our' little game," retorted the other hotly. "I cautioned you against mixing yourself up with those scoundrelly Navajos, and don't you go to imply that I 'm involved with you in any way; I could never look Don Nepomuceno in the face again if I shared your responsibility for encouraging the villains."

"Seems to me," sneered Backus, "that for a man as puts on so much style, and takes up such tonified notions as you, talking about 'never going outside your own colour' and the like, you make pretty considerable of a fuss about a Mexican ranchero and the trouble he 's got himself into."

"I call him a whiter man than you, for one thing," exclaimed Stephens; "and for another, mark me, I hold you personally responsible for this outrage. It 's a more serious matter for you than you seem to be aware of. You 've made yourself liable by the way you behaved yesterday with those redskins, giving them that whiskey and letting them shoot all about your place."

"Why, you was shooting with 'em yourself for one thing," retorted the Texan with intentional insolence in his tone; "and, for another, you mark me, I did n't

give 'em no whiskey." He was deliberately mocking Stephens ; but the latter was in no mood to put up with it, and flinging his right leg over the mare's neck he jumped to the ground facing the quarter-blood Cherokee. He threw the mare's rein to Faro to hold ; it was a trick he had taught him, and the dog stood there obediently with it in his jaws.

" I say you *sold* them the whiskey, then, if you did n't *give* it," he exclaimed, full of scorn for the mean evasion of the storekeeper. " They were excited with liquor when I came down there yesterday. I smelt it on them right there at your house. Don't you dare open your lips to deny it."

" It 's no such a d—d thing !" cried the storekeeper with an ugly look, confident that no one had seen him hand over the two bottles to Mahletonkwa ; the next instant he felt Stephens's clenched fist strike him full on his lying mouth, and he went staggering backward.

Recovering himself, with a look of fury he threw back his right hand to his hip for a pistol ; it was in vain ; he had come without one ; he cast a meaning look at the revolver belted round the prospector's waist. " You 're a d—d brave man, are n't you ? " he sneered, " when you know you 're heeled and I aint."

For answer Stephens instantly unbuckled his belt and hung the pistol over the horn of his saddle. " There, then," he said, and he advanced with his hands up towards the Texan, " if you want a fist fight you can get it right here."

" Yes," said the other, " and then have your infernal dog lay hold of me," and he backed away from Stephens. In height and weight Backus knew himself to be a match for the prospector, but there was a grim

determination about the latter which cowed him. "I'll pay you out for this," he said with oaths, still retreating before Stephens, "but I'll choose my own time for it."

Right behind him ran the acequia, brimming full, as it had been ever since the blasting, but Backus, stepping backwards with his eyes fixed on his enemy, forgot that it was there; he put one foot over the edge of the bank, lost his balance, and fell with his whole length in the water. He emerged, streaming, on the opposite bank, and rescued his hat which had fallen off and was floating away. Then rising, he shook his fist and poured out more curses upon Stephens, who, thinking him sufficiently punished, did not choose to follow him farther. He waited a minute in silence till he saw Backus walk off towards the pueblo, then turning his back on his late adversary he remounted and quickly loped on to overtake his companions.

The prospector's brain was in a whirl as he rode through the fresh morning air and thought over the exciting events that had crowded one upon another since sunrise: the beating of Josefa, the arrest of the cacique, the news of the abduction of Manuelita, and lastly his collision with Backus. The first was already past history, and he had satisfied himself that though the Indian girl must have suffered a good deal she would undoubtedly recover and be all right again; what began to bother him a little now was the somewhat equivocal position in which he had placed himself with regard to her by taking her under his protection and establishing her next door to him in the pueblo under the care of Reyna.

"Well," he thought, "folks may say what they like about it. I did n't see any other way on the spur

of the moment to make her safe ; and now, looking back, I don't see that I could have done anything different. If folks want to talk they must just talk, and that 's all there is in it. I guess I can stand the racket. If Tito brings Felipe back alive they shall get married right away, but if the cacique's bullet has laid the poor chap out, then I shall see what I can do to fix her up good somehow when I get back."

It was perhaps characteristic of him that now, when he was embarked on an expedition full of unknown perils, he said to himself easily "when I get back," without considering for a moment that ere that time came his bones might be bleaching white in some remote gulch, like those of the lone prospector whose tragic end had afforded so much amusement to Mahle-tonkwa and his band.

As for the arrest of the cacique, that, too, was past history, seeing that it was made for an offence that he had now settled to condone. He did not repent of his own action in the matter, either of the arrest or the condonation, but he could not help feeling a certain surprise as he thought of the ease with which the arrest had been effected. The angry chieftain had certainly proved astonishingly meek. As a fact, Stephens mixed so little with men that he was unconscious himself of the power there was in him to dominate others when possessed by strong indignation, and roused to defend the weak from wrong, as he had been that morning. Ordinarily quiet and self-contained in manner, speaking in a gentle voice, and showing an expression of mildness in the blue eyes that had gained him the name of Sooshiuamo, he was capable at times of being transformed by an energy that seemed something outside his *common* self, and by the contrast made him appear to

be the very embodiment of superior and irresistible force.

It was perhaps as well for Backus that Stephens did not know that the storekeeper's greed of gain was at the bottom of the trouble ; since he had deliberately whetted the Navajos' craving for whiskey and then doubled the price of it to them. It was their desire to compel Sanchez to pay them off instantler, and enable them to procure more liquor at any price, that had moved them to the extreme step of seizing his daughter.

But Stephens could not know this. All he knew was that she was gone, and that his one burning desire now was to rescue her from this most miserable fate that had overtaken her. Of what that fate was likely to be, there was in his own mind at this moment no manner of doubt whatever. Sioux and Shoshones, Cheyennes and Arapahoes, Kiowas and Comanches, the wild Indians, one and all, dealt out the same horrible fate to those who were unhappy enough to fall alive into their hands. The men were tied to the stake, or spread-eagled on the ground, and roasted by a slow fire, the fiends, who danced round with hideous yells, cutting slices from the living flesh of their victim and eating them before his eyes. No refinement of torture was spared until death mercifully released him from his agonies. The fate of a woman was worse. If she escaped being scalped and mangled on the spot, because her captors preferred to carry her away with them, she became the common property of the band, and the helpless victim of brutal outrage. Stephens had seen one sad-eyed, heart-broken captive who had been rescued from the clutches of the Sioux, and the memory of her woful tale seemed to ring in his ears now as he rode. And he had been in Denver when the

dead body of a white woman, on which the Cheyenne Dog-Soldiers had worked their will, was brought in from the burnt ranch where they found her. The mangled body was placed in a room before burial, and the men of the city were taken in, a few at a time, to view the ghastly mutilation, and learn what an Indian war meant for their wives and daughters. Denver was young then, and three-fourths of its people were men of fighting age. Stephens could never forget the faces of those men as they returned from that room where the poor remains lay. Some came out sick and faint ; some with faces deadly pale and burning eyes and tight-shut lips ; and some blaspheming aloud and hurling curses on the monsters whose pleasure and delight it was to work such abhorred wrong on poor human flesh.

How vividly it all came back to him as he pressed rapidly forward after his companions ; his heart grew hot within him while he pictured to himself the girl whose charming face he knew so well, and whom he had come to regard with such a friendly liking, now in the grasp of ruthless hands. Well, he would rescue, if indeed any rescue were possible, or perish in the attempt.

“ More he could not ; less he would not ;
Forwards, till the work be done.”

The hoof-strokes of the mare seemed to beat time to the verse.

He overtook the cacique and the two younger men just where the trail they were following left the valley and entered the mountains. It was rougher going here, and Alejandro jumped off and ran behind to ease the mule as they pushed in single file up the rocky path.

After journeying thus for some time they came to a beautiful little grassy park of a few acres, ringed around with dark pines, and with a small stream running through it. The Indians dismounted; the prospector sat in his saddle and looked at them. Were they in earnest in this expedition, or were they only trifling with him? They had hardly been going three hours, and here they were calling a halt already.

"Dismount for a short instant, Sooshiuamo," said the cacique. "We will give the beasts water here, and let them eat a few mouthfuls of grass. It is better so."

Stephens was not aware that it was the custom of the Indians to halt every couple of hours or so on a journey; they believe that the few minutes' rest given thus to their horses enables them to last out better, while American frontiersmen commonly make longer stages and longer halts. But as he had deliberately put himself under the guidance of these men, he thought it better to adopt their methods. He slacked his cinch, and, pulling off the bridle, allowed the mare to graze.

The Indians rolled cigarettes and smoked.

"Beautiful place, Sooshiuamo," said the cacique, who was standing up and looking around admiringly on the little valley. "How good the mountain grass is. I love this valley."

"Yes, it's just what you say, Cacique," answered Stephens; he knew the Indians loved this country which they now, as always, regarded as their own. He often wondered how much they felt the beauty of it in their souls, or whether with them it was a sort of physical instinct, like the yearning horses and cattle feel for their native pastures.

"I love this valley," repeated the cacique; "just

down there is where, with one companion, I killed seven Navajos." He pointed with the hand that held the cigarette to the lower end of the park.

"You killed seven Navajos!" said Stephens, looking at him with surprise. "When was that? How did you manage it?"

"It was in the time of the war," answered the other proudly. "The Navajos used to hide here in the mountains all the time, and fall upon our people when we were at work in our lands. We could not stir outside the pueblo then without arms for fear of being waylaid by the rascals. And our scouts used to come up here in the mountains, too, and watch along the trails to see if any of the Navajos were prowling about, and give the alarm. Once I came up here on scout with another man of Santiago; and we hid and lay all night in that hill," he pointed to a rocky summit shaggy with pines that rose hard by. "And we struck the tracks of seven Navajos who were prowling about here to wait for their chance to make a descent upon our people in their fields. And for days we lay up there and watched them, and they never knew it, for we kept very still. And the third day we saw them making a sweat-house, and we knew they were going to have a bath. They built their house down there in the brush by the creek, and they covered it with willow twigs and sods to keep in the steam, and they made a fire and heated the stones red-hot, and carried them into the house and poured on water. And six of them left their arms outside with their clothes, and went into the bath, and the seventh covered the door with a blanket to keep in the hot steam. And my comrade and I crawled up on them through the brush very quickly, and making no noise, while the seventh

Indian held the blanket over the door. And there I shot him with my gun,"—he threw up his rifle to his shoulder, and took aim at an imaginary Navajo as he spoke, his face glowing with pride and excitement over the recollection,—“and there he fell down dead. And we leaped forward, for we had stolen up very close behind his back, and the six Navajos inside came scrambling out of the sweat-house one after another, and we cracked their skulls, so, with our tomahawks, crack, crack, crack,”—he made an expressive pantomime of dealing heavy blows on a stooping foe,—“and we killed them all, every one. There was no chance for them ; they could not escape. And we took their scalps and the plunder, and brought them home. It was a great triumph. Yes, I do love this valley.”

“I don't doubt it,” said the American ; “you must have been very much pleased with yourselves. You scored there.”

“Oh, we always scored against the Navajos,” returned the other, “whenever we had fair play. The only way they ever could best us was by sneaking round like wolves and catching some of our men at work and off their guard ; but fighting man to man we were far the better warriors. We always beat them then, as I did right here. Yes, I love this place. But come, Sooshiuamo, it is time for us to be moving again.”

Forwards, forwards ever, through the shadow of the pine woods, over the silent carpet of brown fir-needles, where the sudden squirrel chattered and barked his alarm ere he rushed to the safety of his tree-top, over open grassy meadows and along willow-fringed streams where the mountain trout leaped and darted in the eddies. It was indeed a lovely land, rich in timber, rich in pasture, rich, too, as Stephens knew, in gold

and silver, perhaps even in diamonds—who could tell? What tragedies, though, of torturer and tortured it had seen in the past,—ay, and was likely to see again; nay, what hideous things might not that unhappy girl be enduring now somewhere in its wild recesses! That thought never left Stephens for a single moment. The high, park-like country up here was much more open now that the trail had left the rugged defiles that led up into it. He urged his mare forward alongside the cacique's horse.

"When we catch up with the Navajos, Cacique," said Stephens, "what is your plan?"

"Ah," answered the cacique, "we must try the best way we can. If we can catch them off their guard we will fight them perhaps, and give it them hot. But if they are in a strong place like the Lava Beds ahead of us where we cannot get at them, we must try and make terms with them. But it will not be easy to catch them at a disadvantage and fight them; so very likely Don Nepomuceno will be glad to make terms. If he pays them well and gets his daughter back, it will be the best thing we can do."

There was a certain businesslike air of familiarity with the whole matter apparent in the cacique that struck Stephens. Evidently the carrying off of Manuelita belonged to a class of incidents that were by no means unusual according to his experience. As the prospector rode along pondering this fact, he reflected that Salvador was a man now about forty years of age, and that for thirty-five out of those forty years his people and the Navajos had been deadly enemies. It was only the recent conquest of the latter by the Americans that had put them on the novel footing of peace. *Mutual slaughter* and the carrying off of women had

been the normal condition of things during the greater part of his life.

"I gather from what you say about ransom," said the American after a short silence, "that you think the Navajoes would be willing to restore the sefiorita if they were paid. But do you think Don Nepomuceno and Don Andrés will be content to recover her like that? Will not the Navajos be certain to have treated her shamefully, and will her father and her brother be content to get her back without taking vengeance? Will they be content before they have shed blood for her wrongs?"

It jarred upon all his instincts of race feeling to even approach the subject of Manuelita's wrongs to this Indian. The Navajoes and Pueblos might be mutually hostile, and the Pueblo cacique for the present was his friend, but he was an Indian after all, a member of the race to which belonged those Sioux and Cheyennes whose dreadful deeds were burned in upon the American's brain. Ill-treatment of women captives makes an unbridgeable division between race and race. It constitutes

"— the inexpressible wrong, the unutterable shame,
That turns the coward's heart to steel, the sluggard's blood to
flame."

Nevertheless, so great was his anxiety on the subject that he had broken through the reserve natural to him in this matter.

Before answering, the cacique threw a look of pity at him. It was neither pity for her lot, nor for his state of anxious suspense concerning it. It was the contemptuous pity of superior knowledge for the uninstructed person who did not understand Navajos and their ways.

"She 's all right," said he; "the Navajos won't do her any harm unless they are driven to kill her."

"You don't mean to tell me that 's true?" cried Stephens eagerly. "I can't understand how it can be. I know some things about the plains Indians, and I know no woman is spared by them for one hour after she becomes a captive. Do you mean to say that the Navajos are different from all other Indians?"

The cacique laughed with conscious superiority.

"Of course they are different," he answered, "and they always have been. Did n't I say before that they are very foolish, ignorant people? And it is quite true that they are afraid to use violence to captive women, and I will tell you why. It is all because of a foolish religion of their own that they have. You know they are mere heathens; they don't know anything about heaven and purgatory and the rest of it, about all the things the padre tells when he comes to see us. They have foolish stories which they believe, and which the devil has taught them."

Stephens could not help interrupting him. "But how about that turkey-feather business of your own," he asked, "and your sacred snakes?"

- The cacique looked shocked. "Oh, those are our own Santiago mysteries," he said seriously; "we believe what the padre tells us, but we have our own Shiuana—the spirits—to deal with as well, and we have our own way of doing it. That is right for us. But these Navajos have most foolish ideas about the next world. You know they think when they die they will go to another place?"

"Oh, yes," said the American, "the happy hunting-grounds."

"That 's not the name they give it," said the ca-

cique, " but all the same it 's a place they want to go to very much, where they can keep plenty of sheep and horses upon grass richer than the grass of the Chusca Mountains. But they think, silly fools, that before they can get to this good place they have to cross a dreadful dark river that it is very hard to get over. If they can't get over they think that they must wander about for ever in cold and dark and misery. And they think that there is in the next world a wonderful old woman, whom they call Whailahay, and she lives there and knows all the fords of this river, and without her help no one can get over it. So they all want to please her very much. But, you see, Whailahay is a woman, and is very angry if women are ill-treated, at least so they think ; and then, if they have n't let the women on earth have their own way in everything, and do just what they please, Whailahay is very cross with the men, and she won't help them to get across the dreadful dark river to the good place when they die, but leaves them to starve for ever, wandering about shivering and wretched. It is a most foolish story, and the result is that the Navajos spoil their women entirely. They dare not lay a hand on them to keep them in proper order " ; he looked full in Stephens's eyes as he said this, and Stephens looked in his eyes, and each knew the other was thinking of the beating of Josefa.

" No, they dare not touch them in any way against their will," continued the cacique, " and the women are masters of the men, and all in consequence of a foolish story about an old witch. Don't you think it is a foolish story, Sooshiuamo ? "

Stephens's heart bounded with exultation, and he felt as if a heavy load were lifted from his breast.

" Foolish ! " he cried, turning in his saddle with a triumphant laugh of joy, " why, Cacique, don't you see, if that 's so she 'll be safe. Foolish ! I think it 's the very best story I ever heard in my life. Bully for old Madam Whailahay ! "

CHAPTER XVIII

HUNTING A TRAIL

ON they went, on and on, till beneath the rugged peak of the Cerro de las Viboras they saw before them a glorious open valley of a thousand acres, facing the southern sun, and green with young grass.

"This is the Valle Lindito," said the cacique, "and there is our horse herd." A band of two or three hundred horses and mares were grazing peacefully in the valley. It was early yet for foals, but a few here and there were visible, frisking and capering round their dams.

An Indian stallion nickered proudly at the sight of the strangers, and trotted towards them, high and disposedly, tossing his crest and holding his head aloft; at the sight of him Morgana whinnied back, and lo! from a patch of willow brush leaped forth an Indian youth who was on watch; bareback he came full speed on a flying pony and whirled a lasso round and round, and chivied the guardian of the herd back to his mates. Then he rode up to the four and greeted them, and rapid question and answer ensued. The youth was young Ignacio, son to Josefa's elderly would-be bridegroom. No, they had seen no Navajos, nor any tracks of any. Nothing had troubled the herd except that the mountain lions had killed a foal. The travelling Mexican

sheep herds were wandering hither and thither through the mountains, as usual, seeking their appointed stations for the lambing month ere it began. The Jicarilla Apaches had been through not long before and had killed some cattle of the Mexicans—the Indian laughed as he recounted this—and the Mexicans were very angry, but could not catch them. He hinted that Mexican beef tasted sweet, and laughed still more, but the cacique frowned. He did not love the Mexicans—far from it—but his policy was to keep on good terms with them. He repeated his questions about the Navajos.

The rest of the Indian herders came up, and now came news. Yes, they had seen tracks of a travelling party which they supposed to be Indians. Eleven ponies there were altogether, going north-westward from the Mesa del Verendo. No, they had seen no one to speak of, and they had seen no tracks of any party of Mexicans in pursuit. They were astonished when they heard the tale of the abduction of Manuelita, but they had heard of the killing of the Navajo by Don Andrés from the shepherds of a flock of the Preas, which they had met in the Valle Cajon. As for the tracks they had seen that morning, they might be those of Mahletonkwa and his band, or they might have been made by some other Navajos or by Jicarillas. "*Quien sabe?*" But they told the cacique exactly where he would find them next day and then he could judge for himself.

Three fresh horses were now selected and caught. The cacique's horse and Stephens's mule were now turned loose in the Indian herd, where the mule brayed frantically for his beloved Morgana. A hasty meal was eaten, and with young Ignacio added to their party they set forward once more into the wilderness.

Ere the sun was an hour high next morning the cacique and Miguel and young Ignacio were critically examining the eleven ponies' tracks, and trying to make out whether they were those of Mahletonkwa's band or no.

"Almost certainly, yes," was the verdict, and they followed at once hotly on the trail. The fact that they were exactly eleven in number made the probability very great, and the absence of any other later tracks made it certain that if they had really hit it off they must have cut the trail in front of the Mexicans.

The cacique crowed triumphantly.

"Did I not tell you, Sooshiuamo, that the Navajos would throw the Mexicans off the scent on the Mesa del Verendo. You may be very sure that is what has happened. They all scattered out there on the hard ground, and then they turned their course from west to north, and then met again by agreement miles away, and not on the mesa at all, but down below here. The Mexicans will have wasted half the day yesterday in trying to follow their tracks on the Mesa del Verendo, and I expect they are at it yet; while we, you see, who started hours after them, have cut the trail far ahead. Did I not tell you we were great trailers, Sooshiuamo?"

Sooshiuamo could not help thinking that the success of which the cacique was so proud was a good deal due to the information that had been given them, but he wisely did not say so. And at any rate the cacique was entitled to the credit of having guessed rightly the route Mahletonkwa would take, and having steered on his own authority a judicious course to intercept it. They had left the high upland pastures now, and the sierra lay behind them; they were heading into a rolling

country of dry grama grass and cedar- and piñon-trees, a warmer country than the mountains, but not so well watered. Away to the south-west was visible a lofty conical peak standing by itself; it was an extinct volcano. Presently the trail of the eleven ponies turned towards the conical peak.

"I knew it," cried the cacique triumphantly again, "I knew how it would be. The Lava Beds are yonder, and the Navajos are going for them; they have been making a big circuit to throw the Mexicans off the track, but now they have turned for the Beds again. They meant to go there all along. Oh, did n't I know it? Eh, Sooshiuamo?"

Sooshiuamo readily admitted the accuracy with which the Pueblo had grasped the intentions of the Navajos, and praised his skill. Presently they came to a place where the party they were pursuing had halted for a rest and a meal, and here the question as to who they were was decided beyond all doubt. Among the many moccasin-tracks which ran all about the little fire they had made, the keen eyes of the Indians detected the print of a shoe with a heel, the small, dainty shoe of a civilised woman.

"Look," said Miguel, who found it first, pointing it out to Stephens, who, keen-sighted though he was, barely distinguished it in the dry, sandy soil, "there is the foot of the señorita. Look how she is tired and stiff with riding, and walks with little steps. And here is where she lay down on a blanket to rest. Oh, she will be very tired."

Literally, these Indians seemed able to tell every single thing she had done in that camp during the half-hour or hour that had probably been spent there. It was a camp made late in the afternoon of the day be-

fore, so they settled. "Just when we were at the horse herd in the Valle Lindito," said the cacique, who seemed to read the signs left by the different members of the band and by their horses with as much ease and confidence as Stephens would have shown in gathering the meaning of a page of a printed book by glancing his eyes over the hundreds of little black crooked marks on the page, known to civilised beings as letters. But in the art of reading signs the cacique was a past master, where Stephens, to follow up the simile, had but just mastered the alphabet and was struggling with words of one syllable.

Forward once more on the trail, with the increased ardour given by the certainty that now there could be no mistake. As they drew near the Lava Beds, and the shades of evening began to fall, the cacique grew anxious.

"The Tinné,"—Tinné was the Navajos' own name for themselves, and the cacique now began to use it regularly in speaking of them, feeling himself, as it were, on their ground,—"the Tinné," he said, "are sure to keep a close watch on the edge of the Beds where their trail goes in, so as to see who is following them. Let us turn off their trail here and go aside; there is a spring at the edge of the Beds a little north of here; we will camp there for the night, we can do nothing in the Beds in the dark; also if the Mexicans have found the trail again, as they ought to have done by this time, they may follow it part of the night by moonlight and be able to overtake us here. It would be well to have them here before we go into the Beds. Don't you think so, Sooshiuamo?"

Stephens had to agree. It grated on him terribly to leave Manuelita for a second night in the hands of

Mahletonkwa and his band, but it was more than doubtful whether they could possibly find where they had her concealed in the gathering darkness, and there was a good chance of being in a better position to deal with the matter in the morning.

It was already night when the cacique skilfully and cautiously led them to the little spring he knew of near the Beds ; they watered their horses here, and drank, too, themselves, and camped under a cedar bush not far away, without a fire lest the light should betray them. They chewed their tough, dried meat, and ate a little parched corn, and kept watch by turns in the moonlight over their horses during the first half of the night. But nothing disturbed them, and Faro gave no sign of suspecting an enemy at hand when Stephens scouted round with him before moonset, and after that they slept securely.

He was awakened after dawn by the cacique. Miguel had already scouted some way on their back trail ; there was no sign of the Mexicans coming up ; and the cacique now made a somewhat alarming suggestion. Suppose that the Mexicans had not lost the trail on the Mesa del Verendo, as he had conjectured, but had caught the Tinné there and been unlucky enough to be beaten off by them in a fight. It was a contingency that had not occurred to Stephens before, and redoubled his anxiety.

The cacique, as usual, had a plan. He declined, with their small party, to follow the Navajos' trail straight into the Lava Beds. They would be sure to walk into a trap, and if there had been a fight, and the Tinné blood was up, they would be shot down mercilessly from an ambush. He felt sure the Navajos had *established* themselves on a little oasis there was in the

middle of the Beds, where there was grass for their horses; and he proposed to enter the Beds more to the north, where he knew of a practicable place for horses to go in, and so work round to the oasis on the farther side.

This seemed so reasonable that Stephens saw nothing for it but to accede, and accordingly, after watering their stock, they at once proceeded to put it in action.

The Lava Beds were an awful country for horses. From the old volcano an immense mass of lava had flowed over all this part of the country, like a broad river, twenty or thirty feet deep and miles in width. It was a mass of perfectly naked rock, and was incredibly cracked and fissured. The change to it from the open country was instant and abrupt. You could gallop over rolling pasture-lands right to the edge of the Beds, where you must dismount and advance on foot, stepping warily from rock to rock, and choosing carefully a route that it was possible for a sure-footed horse to pick his way over.

After a tedious and toilsome progress of this sort, they came at last to a little opening, a sort of island, as it were, in the lava flow, only that it was lower, most of it, than the actual surface of the flow. Here was a patch of grass, and the cacique suggested that Stephens should remain here with the horses while he and his young men scouted on foot in the direction of the larger opening, or oasis, where he suspected that the Navajos had established themselves.

Stephens was very unwilling to stay behind, but he had to admit that the scouts would probably get on better without him. Accordingly he consented, and stretched himself on his blanket on the ground, holding

the end of the mare's lariat in his hand, while the Indians, drawing their belts tighter and grasping their guns, started off in the new direction indicated by the cacique.

Long he lay there waiting ; an eagle-hawk, attracted by the sight of the horses, swung lazily through the blue sky overhead, and seeing nothing there to interest him sailed off majestically to a richer hunting-ground beyond the barren lava flow. Many thoughts coursed through the mind of the impatient man. He was disappointed that the Mexicans had not come up, and he was impressed by the intense watchfulness and seriousness of the cacique. The Pueblo chief clearly felt himself now in enemies' country, and knew that they were face to face with the chances of a desperate struggle. Any mistake now might land them instantly in a fight, with the odds more than two to one against them; to say nothing of the additional peril this would bring upon Manuelita. Yet something must be done for her, and that without delay. Stephens could not endure the thought of leaving her another day and night in the power of those savages. He had been partly reassured by the cacique's account of the superstitious influence of Whailahay in protecting women, but still—the possibilities that presented themselves to his mind were too awful. No, come what would, whether the Mexican party arrived in time or not, when he found the Navajos something should be done. And then his eye lit on the figure of the cacique bounding from block to block of the Lava Beds, and coming towards him with manifest excitement in his air.

The Navajos were found.

"We've caught up with them at last," said the Pueblo chief in an excited half-whisper. "All the

Tinné are camped in a hollow just beyond there," and he pointed eagerly to a rise in the lava bed that bounded their view to the immediate front.

"And the girl?" queried the American hoarsely. "Is she there too? Have any of you seen her?"

"Oh, she 's sure to be there," said the cacique. "She can't fail to be there. No, we did n't any of us positively set eyes on her, but Miguel, who got into the best position to spy on them, was able to count their horses; the whole lot of them, all the eleven, are there in the 'abra,'—the opening or oasis in the Lava Beds,—so of course she must be there."

"True," answered Stephens somewhat doubtfully. "That is, I suppose, you argue that if the horses are there she must be so, too; because if they had taken her elsewhere they 'd have had to take a horse to carry her. But," he added, "as Miguel even did n't actually see her, might she not perhaps have escaped on foot?"

The Indian gave a smothered laugh of derision. "She escape?" he said; "escape from the Tinné! Never. No captive ever escapes. Too well watched."

Miguel himself, with Alejandro and young Ignacio, now came up and joined them, and Stephens closely examined them as to what they had seen. They confirmed unanimously the conclusions that the cacique had arrived at. Manuelita was certainly there. Whether the Navajos were aware of their presence or not, was, however, uncertain. All they could say was that they had been most careful not to give the Tinné a chance by exposing themselves to view, and that therefore the probability was that they were still in ignorance. But they might have spotted the Pueblos in spite of all their care, and be simply lying low in order to entrap them.

"What 's the best move now ?" said Stephens.

"It will be better if we return back some way," said the cacique. "The Mexican party may come up to-day, and then we can join forces with them. But if the Mexicans don't come, then, when night falls, we must go forward again on foot and creep up close to their camp and see if we get a chance to do anything. If they have n't seen us, maybe we might get a chance to steal her away from them."

"But if they have seen us ?" said Stephens.

"Then," returned the cacique, "they are going to try to creep on us certainly, perhaps kill us, perhaps in the dark steal our horses ; the Tinné men are wonderful clever horse-thieves."

Stephens meditated. By the Indian scouts' account it seemed to be about an even chance whether the Navajos had discovered them or not. But, according to his view of the matter, if they had, all idea of keeping concealed from them any longer was ridiculous ; and their wide-awake enemies would be free to attack them if they chose, or else to decamp in the night, taking their prisoner with them, and very possibly taking their pursuers' horses as well. Here, to his mind, was a strong argument against waiting.

True, there was the other side of the question to be considered : supposing that the Navajos had not detected their presence, it was not impossible that his Pueblo friends, if their pluck was equal to their undeniable skill, might haply be successful in effecting the girl's release by some stratagem. But, after all, it was only a chance, and a slim chance at that, he thought ; and, moreover, there was one point about this latter scheme which he found it hard to digest—he would himself assuredly be asked to stay behind again. He was

perfectly well aware by this time that if they wanted to creep on the Navajo camp for the purpose of rescuing the girl by stealth, his Indian friends would not want to have him accompany them, on the ground that as a white man he was unable to move about with the silent, snake-like liteness of a redskin. And they would be right, from their point of view ; so much he could not refuse to admit to himself in his secret heart ; he could not but recognise his inferiority in this qualification, knowing as he did the red men's great gifts. But from his own point of view this would not do at all. The simple fact was that he did not trust their resolution unless he himself were actually with them to keep them up to the mark. They had just made one reconnaissance by themselves, leaving him behind, and it struck him that they had not pushed it very vigorously. One of them, Miguel, had advanced far enough to be able to count the Navajo ponies. That really was all the information they had brought back.

Now suppose they were to start out again to-night, by themselves, after her ; and suppose they failed to get her out of the Indian camp, while he had remained at the rear and never even made so much as one try at it personally himself ; why, he would feel bitter humiliation all his life long in consequence, and the unhappy girl would be dragged away to suffer fresh miseries in a new hiding-place. That was what really galled him. That they would kill her he did not now think, because he was convinced that the cacique was right in saying that what they were after was Don Nepomuceno's money. But that she was safe from violence in their hands he was far less certain. Whailahay's supernatural influence might not prove to be the safeguard the cacique had represented it to be ; and in that case

her lot might be, nay, surely would be, that of the miserable victim of the Sioux. This waiting was becoming detestable. One solution presented itself with overwhelming urgency to his mind, a solution which imperiously closed these dull debates and tedious, hesitating delays. There was one phrase of General Grant's—Grant was an Ohio man like himself, and his ideal hero,—it occurred in a summons that Grant once sent to an enemy to surrender, and it ran, "I propose to move immediately upon your works." That was the right sort of talk. That was the sort of thing he would like to say to the Navajos, and, as they would n't surrender, then do as Grant would have done, "advance immediately." Yes, he would propose an immediate advance to his four Pueblo companions; if they rejected his proposal then he would take his own line.

"Look here, Cacique," he said firmly, "we've had enough of this creeping and crawling around. Let's wade right in. Come on. You stick by me, and we'll go right at them, and we'll lick spots out of 'em." His eyes flashed, and his powerful frame seemed to dilate and grow as the fire of battle kindled in him. The Pueblo chief smiled on him as one might on an impatient child.

"No sense in that talk," he said with calm superiority. "Don't you see? they're eleven and we're five; as soon as you begin to shoot, they'll kill that girl quick, so that all of them may be free to fight us. Then I think they'll kill us, too. They're too many"; and he counted the whole eleven over on his fingers, and shook his head impressively and ominously.

"They'll not kill her," said Stephens, "she's

worth too much to them. And as for their killing us—well, two can play at that game.” He patted the Winchester fondly as he spoke. “Come on, Cacique, and show yourself a man. Five brave men can lick a dozen cowards any day. Buck up, Cacique. Why, you told me that you yourself with only one pard killed seven Navajos by catching them off their guard. Suppose now that these chaps have n’t seen us, why should n’t we do as well?”

“Ah,” said the other, “but these Navajos are well posted in their stronghold. My partner and I caught ours in a trap. But if we wait maybe we might get the chance to catch these ones in a trap, too.”

The American argued the point a little longer, with no effect, however, for the cacique’s prudent decision remained immovable. But Stephens had hardened his heart to the sticking-point, and he refused to wait. He would go forward alone. He drew a deep breath as he turned his eyes from the black Lava Beds around, and looked at the distant hills, dotted over with dark piñon, shining in the sunlight far away, and then up at the great overarching vault of blue above. Death had no morbid attraction for him; he was a lover of life, and the air of heaven tasted good as he drew it in. But he wanted no life that was disgraced in the sight of his own soul. He had come out to rescue this girl, and he would do it or die. These red men shilly-shallied; their one idea was to employ feints and stratagems, and take no risks. They must act according to their lights; his own course was clear.

“Then, Salvador,” said he, looking the cacique hard in the eyes, “since you won’t come on there’s only one thing left to be done, and that is for me to try the thing by myself. What will you do if I go ahead alone?”

The cacique made no direct reply, but turned hastily to his three companions, and some rapid remarks were interchanged between them. Quickly he produced a grey powder of some unknown kind from a little pouch, and he shared it out among his three fellow-tribesmen. They all of them bared their tawny breasts and rubbed it over their hearts, speaking magic words the while. The silent American gazed at them, half in wonder, half in scorn.

"What 's all that amount to?" he asked.

"Strong medicine, Sooshiuamo, to make our hearts brave," answered all of them together.

"Then I 'd rather you 'd got a little sand in your craws," muttered Stephens in English. He had hardened his heart for a desperate venture, and their reluctance to follow him vexed him sorely. "There is n't one of them, not one, I don't believe, that 's got any sand," he repeated. To have "sand," means to be willing to fight to the death when called upon, and that was just what these men were not willing to do. Then aloud in Spanish: "What 's the good of all that tomfool business?" he asked. "You 're only humbugging yourselves about it. You don't really mean fight." There was bitter scorn in his tones.

"Oh, yes, we can fight," retorted the Pueblo chief, not a little nettled at the American's words, "but we 're not fools—at least not such fools as to want to get killed. But we 've got a very good place to fight from here. If you go forward by yourself, and they shoot at you, then we 'll be able to shoot at them from behind these rocks. First-class shelter here."

"Oh, it 's A1," said Stephens sarcastically; "it 's a splendid place to shoot from at people who are four hundred yards away, and out of sight." He gave a

laugh of contempt. "Well, don't you make any cursed error, though, and shoot me in the back by mistake," he went on, while buckling his belt a couple of holes tighter, and securing his pistol holster at the back of his right hip so that it should not work round to the front of his body when he stooped and bent down to creep, as he must needs do, in the course of his advance on the Navajo camp. He saw to it that the buckskin strings which secured his moccasins were securely knotted, studiously attending to each detail with the tense nerves of the man who says to himself at every little bit of preparation, "*Now* may be the very last time I shall ever do that." To his revolver and rifle he needed not to look; they were freshly cleaned and oiled, and full of cartridges; both would go like clockwork, and he knew it. He handed the riata of the mare to the cacique. "You look after her for me, Salvador," he said; "I don't know that I'll be needing her again, but I guess if I leave her with you I'll know where to find her if I do."

"Come on, Faro," said he to the dog, patting his head and raising a warning finger to bid him come quietly, as if it had been for a stalk on some unsuspecting stag, and turning his back on the four Indians the white man went forward alone.

CHAPTER XIX

RUN TO GROUND

BENDING low, now creeping on all fours, now running with his body doubled to his knees, diverging to right or left as projections in the Lava Beds seemed to offer a favourable screen, but ever and always making for the front, the solitary man pressed on, his rifle grasped sometimes in the left hand, sometimes in the right, as the need for using one hand or the other in his advance arose. Twice he stopped to recover breath, while pushing his way onward, and cautiously twisted his head around to see what had become of his Pueblo friends ; but they were invisible. Their skill in keeping under cover at least was undeniable. On he went again, till finally he reached the brow of the great rise in the lava bed from which Miguel had reconnoitred the Navajo camp. Past this he tried to get without exposing himself unduly, but thrice he failed to find cover, and retreated again to look for a better spot. The fourth time he found a hollow in the lava with a rise on the right of it that promised him some shelter, and flat on his face in this he wormed himself slowly along, the eager bulldog flattening himself against the rock by his side. Often had he crawled like this beside his master to get a chance at a deer. But it was more dangerous game

than deer that they were stalking now. Having gained some twenty yards by this creep, Stevens slowly raised his head to get a view of the new ground that he knew should become visible in front of him from here. He caught sight of a little green oasis amid the lava beyond, of a band of ponies grazing in it, and of figures seated in a group on the far side ; and, by Heaven ! amid the figures his quick eye detected the flutter of a pink muslin which he had often seen Manuelita wear.

"Great Scot !" he ejaculated, "she's found. There she is." He raised himself a little higher to get a better view, and take in the details of the hostile camp, when suddenly a jet of smoke came out of the lava scarce a hundred yards away, the sharp snap of a rifle was heard, and a bullet clapped loudly on the rock close to his head. The Navajos were not taken by surprise.

The Navajos had spotted the Pueblo scouts ; they took their appearance as a signal for fight, and now they were ready to give them or anyone with them a warm reception. This bullet was their first greeting.

The lead, splashing off the rock, splattered sharply on Stephens's cheek. Instinctively he threw up his right hand and passed it over the side of his face, but the splashes did not even draw blood, and his eye was happily uninjured. In a moment he raised his rifle to shoot back, but before he could get a bead the gleam of the rifle-barrel from which the shot had come, and the head of the Indian that had aimed it disappeared. "Dropped down to reload," said the frontiersman to himself. "He's a goodish shot, that Navajo son of a gun ; that was a close call."

Lowering his head under cover, he decided to try a trick. Opening a recess in the butt of his Winchester,

he drew out four little iron rods which, when screwed together, made a cleaning-rod about thirty inches in length. Then he took off his hat, put the end of the cleaning-rod inside it, and slowly hoisted it into view a yard or so away to the right of where he had looked over before. He lay on his left side and elbow, with his Winchester in his left hand, and the right arm extended raising the hat. Snap went the sharp report of a rifle again ; there was a hole through the hat ; dropping the rod instantly he seized his rifle with both hands and raised himself for a quick shot. But there was nothing visible worth shooting at. Once more the quick dissolving puff of smoke and the gleam of a rifle-barrel disappearing were all that he got a glimpse of. His little ruse had failed, and he was clearly discomfited, while a loud whoop of derision rang out from the rocks ; it was the Navajo equivalent for "Sold again !" It was echoed from another quarter, and from another, by wild unearthly yells.

"Aha, white man," those yells seemed to say, "we've caught you now ! How do you feel now ? This is our country and not yours ; aha ! it is our home, and it shall be your grave ; the vulture and the coyote know the Navajo war-whoop, and they are hurrying to pick your bones. Aha, aha !"

The solitary man felt his heartstrings quiver at the cruel sounds, but he kept his eyes glued to the place where the puffs of smoke had come from ; the next time that devilish redskin put up his head to fire he would try who could draw a bead the quicker.

At this moment he was startled by a loud, coarse voice, quite close to him apparently, but coming from an unseen speaker. The words were Spanish. "*Es tu, Sooshuamo ?*"—"Is it you, Sooshuamo ?" The

voice was the unmistakable voice of Mahletonkwa, with its thick, guttural tones.

Stephens hesitated a moment. Should he break silence and answer? He had neither fired a shot nor uttered a sound so far. But he had been discovered, for all that, and was there any further use in trying to conceal his exact position? He decided to answer.

"*Si, sey,*" he called out in a loud voice. "Yes, that's who I am. Is that you there, Mahletonkwa?" But he did not turn his eyes in the direction of the unseen voice that had addressed him; he kept them fastened on the distant spot where he expected the rifle-barrel to reappear. Nor did he judge amiss. The hidden marksman, who thought that the American's gaze would be turned in the direction of the voice in answer to which he had spoken, put up his rifle for a third shot at him. Quick as lightning Stephens brought the Winchester to his shoulder; but even now he did not pull the trigger, for as his rifle came up the Indian's head went down again, and again those wild derisive whoops rang out, and again the voice of the unseen man, concealed so close to him, addressed him in Spanish.

"What are you doing here, Sooshuamo? and what do you want?"

Was the voice nearer than before? Was this only a trick of the Navajos to get him off his guard? Stephens mistrusted that it was so; but he coolly made reply. "Why do your men shoot at me, Mahletonkwa? I want to talk to you. I want that Mexican girl, the *Señorita Sanchez*, whom you have carried off." He would see if they were open to an offer.

"Who is with you?" asked the voice of Mahletonkwa. "Who are those behind you? Where are the soldiers?"

Stephens determined to try to run a bluff.

"They're coming," said he confidently. "Don't you delude yourself. We've got force enough to take her back. You'd better surrender her quietly at once."

"Pooh!" answered Mahletonkwa tauntingly, "you've got no soldiers. The storekeeper burnt the letter you sent to the general, I know."

This was a blow to Stephens, and the moment he heard the Indian say it, he recognised the probability of its truth. Backus must have played traitor, and, what was more, he must have told the Navajos that he had done so. This Indian could never have invented such a story himself.

"Suppose he did," returned Stephens, determined to keep up his bluff; "that does n't prevent me meeting Captain Pfeiffer and a troop of cavalry on the road and bringing them along." He raised his voice so that all those Indians who were within earshot might hear him. "If you dare hurt one hair of the sefiorita's head, you will every one of you be shot or hanged. You mark me."

While he was speaking the Navajo who had fired at him twice already put up his head for a third shot, but he bobbed it down quicker than before as the ready Winchester came up to the American's cheek.

The prospector lowered his piece once more instead of letting fly; he was determined not to throw away his first shot. He had plenty of cartridges, but he knew that to risk beginning with a miss would only embolden his enemies, and he meant to strike terror from the start.

The red Indian is as brave as the next man, but he objects to getting killed if he can help it, and he will

carefully avoid exposing himself to the aim of a dead-shot. These Navajos had all seen Stephens drive the nail.

Stephens's verbal threat, however, only provoked Mahletonkwa's derision. "Pooh!" he retorted jeeringly, "where are your friends now? It is getting time for them to come and save you. You 'll see, though, they can't do it. We 'll show you what we are. We are Tinné; we are men." The word Tinné means "men" in the Navajo language. They call themselves "the men" *par excellence*.

"Chin-music's cheap," rejoined Stephens, taunting him back. "Say, have you forgotten your time on the Pecos at Bosque Redondo already? You felt like 'men' there, did n't you, when you were grubbing for roots and catching grasshoppers and lizards to eat like a lot of dirty Diggers?"

"Hah!" replied the Indian indignantly, "I never saw Bosque Redondo. All the soldiers you could get could n't take me where I did n't choose to go. I don't take orders from any agent or any general. Nobody ever commands me." There spoke the soul of the true son of the desert. Personal liberty was to him as the breath of his nostrils. Nevertheless, beneath his boastful assertions Stephens thought he detected an undertone that might indicate a willingness to treat, and he slightly altered his own tone.

"Mahletonkwa, you're playing the fool. Why don't you bring the girl back quietly?"

"Well, if you want her," answered the Navajo, "why don't you come out of your hole and talk business?"

"Yes, and get shot by treachery for my pains!" answered Stephens indignantly. "I have n't attacked

you. Your men began ; they 've shot at me twice without warning."

" Well," said the Navajo, " you tell your men, if you have any, that they are not to shoot, and I 'll tell mine not to shoot, and then you and I can talk together. I 'm willing to treat."

An idea struck Stephens ; he had already insinuated that he had Captain Pfeiffer—a name of terror to the Navajoes and Apachs—at his back ; he would keep up that pretence, at least for a time. He turned and shouted aloud in English at the pitch of his voice, " O Captain Pfeiffer ! O Captain Pfeiffer ! Keep your soldiers back. Don't let them fire a shot." He paused, and then continued shouting again, but this time in Spanish, " O Captain of the Indian scouts," he would not give away the Santiago cacique in any wise by calling him by name, " let your scouts keep their posts and watch, but let them not fire a shot. Let them wait till I return. Peace talk."

The four Pueblo Indians heard him, and understood, and from their hiding-places they shouted back in assent.

" You see," cried he to his wily foe, " my men are warned. Do you send your men back to your camp, and come out and meet me in the open, eye to eye."

" No treachery ? " said the Indian.

" No treachery," answered the white man.

The Navajo called to his companions, and presently Stephens had glimpses here and there of stealthy forms slinking through the Lava Beds back in the direction of the oasis where their horses were grazing.

" Now you come out," called Mahletonkwa to the American.

" Come forward then, you, too," said Stephens.

"You first," returned the savage.

Stephens decided to take the risk and set the example. Grasping his rifle in his left hand, he held it across his body, while he raised his open right hand above his head in sign of amity, as he rose to his full height. Not twenty yards away, across the ridge of rock that had covered him on his right hand, he caught sight of Mahletonkwa's copper-coloured visage, with the watchful dark eyes fastened on him, as they peered through a loophole-like fissure in the lava, where he was crouching.

Stephens, his head a little thrown back, his breast expanded, braced himself to receive, and to return if he could, the treacherous bullet he more than half expected.

"Stand up there you, Mahletonkwa, like me." He spoke proudly. "Be a man; stand up."

Very watchfully, both hands grasping his gun at the ready, the Indian rose to his feet. He looked like a fierce, cunning wolf hesitating whether to snap or to turn tail.

With right hand still extended, Stephens moved step by step towards his enemy, Faro keeping close to his heels. Not for a moment did the white man remove his eye from the Indian, alert to detect the first motion towards raising the gun, as he felt for his footing on the rough lava blocks, careful not to look down lest an unfair advantage should be taken of him. At five yards off he halted. The fissured rock behind which Mahletonkwa had been crouching was now all that separated them.

"Is there not peace between us?" exclaimed Stephens. "What do you fear? Why does your gun point my way?"

"Is not your gun in your hand, too?" returned the Indian. "Put it down and I will put mine down."

Stephens lowered his right hand, and bending his knees slowly he sank his body near enough to the ground to lay his Winchester at his feet, but he never took his eyes off the Indian, and his fingers still encircled the barrel and the small part of the stock.

"Down with yours too, Mahletonkwa," he said quietly.

The Indian placed his piece at his feet, hesitated a moment, and then removed his hands from it and sat up, resting himself on his heels. Stephens likewise took his hands from his weapon and sat on a rock. Mutual confidence had advanced so far, although each was still intensely suspicious of the other.

"Now, tell me," said Stephens, "what did you carry off the girl for?"

"To get our pay for our dead brother," returned the red man.

"You did wrong then. You should have complained to the agent at Fort Defiance if you thought you had a claim to compensation. You should not have done an act of war by carrying her off."

"Huh! Was it not you who tried to send for the soldiers when we came to claim compensation?"

"Certainly I sent for them. You refused a reasonable offer, and you threatened to kill my Mexican friends instead. That was why I sent for them."

"It was you who caused the Mexicans to refuse compensation. They would have paid up and settled with us if it had not been for you."

"No, not so. It was you who asked a ridiculous price. I urged Nepomuceno Sanchez to make terms with you. But not at your price. You asked for the

dead man's weight in silver, pretty near. I don't believe you know how much a thousand dollars is; I don't believe you could count it."

"Yes I could," said the Indian sulkily; "it's a back-load for a man to carry a day's journey."

Stephens figured on the weight, as stated by the Indian, for a moment. "Well, I've got to admit you do seem to know something about it, after all," he answered; "your figures come out about right. And, as I said before, it was a perfectly absurd amount to ask. And then, to make it worse, instead of trying to make terms, you commit an outrage of this kind by carrying off an innocent girl by violence."

"She has not been ill-treated," said the Indian; "she has not been subject to violence while we have had her. We have taken good care of her." He spoke very earnestly and with marked emphasis.

"That's your story," returned Stephens; "I only hope it's true. It'll be better for you if it is. But anyways there's no denying the fact that she's been brutally dragged from her home."

"That's nothing much," said the Indian briefly; "she's not been ill-treated"; and he explained clearly enough what he meant by ill-treatment. Stephens understood him, and shuddered to think of that poor girl having lain for two days and nights completely at the mercy of this savage. But he remembered Madam Whailahay, and the cacique's wonderful account of the power of that superstition over the Tinné. It might prove to be true, as Mahletonkwa asserted, that the captive had been spared the worst. And the Navajo really did seem to have a notion of coming to terms. But on what basis were they to deal? How far could they trust each other? That was the crucial question.

"Look here now, Mahletonkwa," said he, "you take me straight to where she is, and let me talk to her quietly; and you give me your solemn promise that you won't try to make me prisoner, but will let me return to my own men unharmed, and I'll see what I can do to make peace for you." He had a special object in making this speech; it was to test the truth of the Indian's words. If the Navajo refused the permission for him to see her, he would be discrediting his own assertion that the girl was not seriously harmed; moreover, though Stephens had small faith in the Indian's honour, and was by no means unprepared to find that the promise, if given, was given only to entrap him, he nevertheless thought it politic thus to require it, that by making such a show of confidence on his own part in Mahletonkwa's honour he might beget a corresponding return of confidence from the other.

The Navajo pondered a moment on the proposition. "Yes," he said presently, looking up, his distrustful eyes, still full of suspicion, resting doubtfully on Stephens. "Promise, you, that your men stay where they are, and do nothing against us, and I'll take you to her."

"I'll do that much," answered the American; "so then it's a bargain."

"It's a bargain," returned the red man; the confidence shown in him was producing its effect.

"That's all right then," said Stephens cheerfully, rising to his feet and leaving his Winchester still on the ground. He was not one whit less on the alert than before, but his cue now was to betray no distrust. For the first time since their meeting he took his eyes off Mahletonkwa and looked back to where he had left

his Pueblo friends, who had remained all this time as invisible as ever, waiting on the event with the inexhaustible patience of their race.

"Hullo!" he called back, "you scouts, stay there where you are till I come back again. I am going to the camp of the Navajos to see about settling things."

As before, the Pueblos acknowledged his message from afar with a wild answering shout of assent.

He turned round, picked up his Winchester in a quiet, undemonstrative manner, and threw it into the hollow of his arm. "Go ahead, Mahletonkwa," said he, "you heard what I said. They will keep still till I return. Let's go to your camp, you and me."

The redskin likewise stood up with his weapon in his hand. "I've got to give some orders, too," he said, and he began to speak in his own tongue. Much to Stephens's surprise he was answered at once from a few yards off. The head of a concealed Navajo suddenly appeared from a fissure near at hand. Stephens instantly recognised him as the Notalinkwa whom Don Nepomuceno had said was as big a villain as the other. He rapidly calculated in his mind what this might mean. It was, in a measure, evidence that the Navajo chief had not been intending to keep faith. At any rate, this was proof positive that he had only made a pretence of sending his men away while he met Stephens alone; and yet during their colloquy he had kept this confederate posted within a few yards of him the whole time. "It's all right," said Mahletonkwa, in answer to the look of surprise apparent on Stephens's face; "no treachery, no lies. I leave Notalinkwa here to watch for us that your men don't advance. Come along. It's all right."

That Mahletonkwa should leave a sentinel now

seemed natural enough, and Stephens decided promptly to acquiesce. He was in for it now, and he must play the game boldly, and with unhesitating steps he followed the Navajo chief over the rugged lava to the camp where the prisoner was held.

The camp lay in a narrow sunken meadow, of a few acres in extent, bordered on either side by the black, forbidding wall of the lava bed. An unknown cause had here divided the lava stream for some hundreds of yards, leaving the space between unravaged by the desolating flow. And in the little oasis thus shut off the grass grew rich and green, looking tenfold brighter from its contrast with the blackened wilderness around.

"What a perfect place for stock-thieves to hide in," thought Stephens as he beheld it. "Of course these Navajos know every hidden recess like this in the country." His eyes eagerly scanned the scene for the form that was the object of his search. Close under the rocks, on the far side, was the group of which he had already caught a glimpse from the point where he had had his colloquy with the Indian chief. Yes, it was indeed her dress he had discerned. There she was, sitting on the ground amid the saddles and horse furniture, the Navajo guards standing watchfully about in the space between him and her as he and Mahle-tonkwa approached. Guns were visible in the hands of most of them, but some carried only bows. He took note that the latter were strung, and that besides the bow two or three arrows were held ready in the fingers of the left hand.

But though his swift, wary glance took in every detail, it was to the face of the captive girl that his eyes were most anxiously directed. As he approached she sprang to her feet, and with a cry of recognition ran

forward to meet him. Some of the Indians put out their hands as if to restrain her, but at a sign from Mahletonkwa they refrained. His outstretched hand met hers in a vigorous clasp.

"You have come," she cried in broken tones, "you have come at last. And my father,—is he safe?"

"Yes, he 's safe," said the American, "and so are you."

CHAPTER XX

THE WOLF'S LAIR

“YOU ’LL be all right now,” said Stephens ; “you ’ve nothing to fear.” He deliberately assumed a security he was far from feeling, but it was part of the game he must play. Her little hand still lay in his ; it was the first time it had ever done so ; it seemed as if the firm pressure of his strong fingers must reassure this poor terrified young thing, the wild leaping of whose pulses he could feel. Her breast heaved convulsively as she strove to control her sobs ; the great tear-drops gathered under her eyelids and ran down her cheeks.

“Great God !” he said, “that you should have suffered like this ! But don’t be afraid ; we ’ll get you out of this all right.” His voice sounded in his own ears strained and unnatural. He was trying his best to play his part by appearing cheerful and consolatory, while at that very same moment the strongest feeling in him was a burning, fierce desire to pump lead into the gang of savages who had made this tender creature suffer this agony of terror. And but for her presence he might have done it there and then. To preserve her, however, it was above all things necessary to temporise ; and to preserve her must be his first thought. He *must* hear her own story and consult with her on his

next move; but to do that he must talk in Spanish, which Mahletonkwa understood. What a pity she did not speak English, but that could not be helped. How could he manage to take her out of earshot.

"Oh, where is my father? where is Andrés?" she sobbed, in a passion of fear for the possible fate of her own people. "I heard two shots, and then I heard no more. Were they there?"

"Oh, they're all right," said the American heartily, in the very cheerfullest tones he could muster. "Don't you fret, señorita," and he patted reassuring the little hand he held in his, loosing his grip of his rifle to do so and squeezing the trusty weapon against his body with his elbow. "It was only me out there that they were shooting at; no harm done. Your father and brother are all right." Nevertheless this repetition by her of her anxious inquiries brought a disturbing idea into his head. Had she any special reason for thinking that her father and her brother were wounded or slain? Could the cacique's conjecture have been true, and had the Mexicans overtaken Mahletonkwa's band on the Mesa del Verendo and fought with them there and been beaten off? He longed to ask her about this, but he did not like to do so within hearing of the Navajos. Still, he reflected, Mahletonkwa would hardly have met him so boldly if there was fresh blood on his hands. Ah, but he might have done that to lure him into this trap; and now, behold, here he was in the wolf's lair! Thoughts raced through his mind like lightning. Then he spoke.

"Mahletonkwa, I suppose you make no objection to her coming with me now?"

"Not go," was the somewhat ominous reply; "stay here; sit down; talk."

"But I want to talk to her by herself," he said; "I suppose you won't object, then, if we go to the middle of the meadow and sit down there?"

"Not go," repeated the Indian deliberately; "yes, you can go and sit in there if you like," and he pointed to the overhanging side of the lava bed, close to which was the camp.

"He means the cave there where the water is," quickly interposed the girl, who was by this time recovering the control of her voice, though her breast still heaved convulsively.

"All right, then, certainly, let's come on there; that'll do as well," said the American with assumed ease. Still keeping her hand in his, he turned in the direction indicated, and made a move as if to start. The other Navajos rapidly exchanged some sentences in their own language.

"You must leave your rifle if you go in there," said Mahletonkwa, turning to Stephens again after listening to what they said.

"No," replied he, "certainly not. I'm no prisoner. No treachery, Mahletonkwa." He slung himself round and faced the chief, placing himself directly in front of the captive girl, as if assuming possession of her.

"No treachery," re-echoed the Indian promptly, "only"—he hesitated to say what was in his mind, but Manuelita divined it instantly.

"Their water is in the cave in a great rock-hole," she said, "and he fears you will take cover in there and then shoot at him from thence."

"No, I won't, Mahletonkwa," said Stephens at once; "I won't do that, and I had n't ever even thought of such a thing. It was your own suggestion that I *should* go there. I had rather go out in the middle

of the meadow where I proposed first ; there 's no cover out in the meadow."

" No, not there," said Mahletonkwa ; " better you go on into the cave " ; and following his direction they went forward together hand in hand.

Right in under the lava bed there was visible a wide, overarching cavity extending some twenty or thirty feet back and at the far end of this lay a deep natural rock-cistern full of clear dark water. It was a hidden well.

" This is their spring," said the girl, pointing to it. " These Navajos know every secret water-spring in the country."

The extraordinary quickness with which she had mastered her feelings, and now the perfectly natural tone in which she spoke, and the straightforward way in which she referred to her captors, greatly relieved the American's anxiety ; had she suffered at their hands what his knowledge of the nature of Indians had led him to dread, it seemed to him that she could not have spoken of them in this unembarrassed style. She had raised her eyes to his as she uttered the words, and though they were still wet with the tears that she had shed, their glance was frank and open ; there was no trace in her mien of the dull despair of irreparable wrong he remembered in the victim of the Sioux. His relief was shown by the reassured expression in his own eyes as he returned her glance, and said lightly ;

" Oh yes, of course they must know them all ; why, they 're simply bound to know this whole country just like a book. They 'd never be able to fly around in it, keeping themselves out of sight in the way they do, if they did n't."

The pair seated themselves on the rock forming the

lip of the cistern. They were here out of earshot of the Indians if they did not speak loud.

"Now tell me, señorita," he began in a low voice, "how you were carried off."

She blushed and looked down. "I hardly know how to say it," she said, "it was all so quick. I had got up and gone across the patio, thinking it was near daybreak—you know there was no moon—and never dreaming of the possibility of any danger inside the house, when I was seized from behind, and gagged and bound in a moment; and then they threw a riata round me and lifted me to the top of the house, and down the outside on to a pony's back, and I was hurried off I knew not where. Oh, it was dreadful! I was gagged so that I could not even cry out, and I did not know where they were taking me or what would become of me. Oh, I was terribly frightened!" She paused, quite overcome for the moment by the recollection.

Stephens felt a passion of pity sweep through his whole being at the thought of the helpless plight of this lovely girl in the hands of enemies—such enemies! "Yes," he said soothingly, taking her hand again in his—they had unclasped hands as they sat down; "don't be afraid; you're all right now; but go on and tell me about it."

"There is n't anything to tell," she answered with a little half-laugh that was almost hysterical. "They held me on a horse, and we rode and we rode and we rode, till I was so tired that I thought I should have fainted; but," said she proudly, "I did n't faint. Then, when the daylight came, I was blindfolded with a rag—pah!"—she added with a little *moue* of disgust—"such a dirty rag!—I don't like these Indians,—they're not at all clean people."

Stephens could not help smiling to himself at this bit of petulance. If she had nothing worse to complain of than their lack of soap and water they could afford to smile a little now, he and she both.

"Yes," he assented with amused gravity, "they do show a most reprehensible neglect of the washtub. In fact, I don't suppose there's such a thing as a proper washboard in the whole Navajo nation."

Their eyes met again, and they both laughed, he of set purpose to raise her spirits, she because she could not help it. The awful tension of her captivity, a tension that had never ceased for a moment, not even in her fitful and broken snatches of sleep, was relaxed at last. In the presence of this brave man who had come to rescue her, confidence returned, and now the reaction of feeling was so strong that, had she let herself go, she could have laughed as wildly as a maniac. But her spirit was unbroken, and she held herself in.

"So, then, with that rag over your eyes you had no sort of idea where you were being taken to?" he said interrogatively.

"No," she answered; "how could I? Except, indeed, for the sun on my neck sometimes; that made me think we were going north or west a good deal,—at least it seemed as if we were."

"Exactly so; you were quite right," he said encouragingly; thinking to himself as he said so that she must have been a real plucky girl to have kept her head cool enough to allow her to observe things with so much accuracy. "Yes," he repeated, "that was exactly your course at first, between north and west. And about your food? What did you do? Had you anything to eat?"

"Nothing but raw dried meat," she answered, her

pretty upper lip curving with disgust, "and it was so hard. My mouth aches with the pain of eating it. These savages don't know how to cook it properly; they chew it raw as they go along, generally; or if they stop and camp and make a fire, they have nothing to cook it in; they don't boil it or fry it; they don't always even pound it with a stone to make it soften, but just throw it on the coals till it is scorched, and then eat it so, all blackened and burned. Savages!" and again she made a face to express her contempt for their very rudimentary ideas of cookery. Once more their eyes met, and they both laughed again.

"I am afraid," said he with grave apology, "that I have been careless, too. I have n't brought along anything nice for you to eat. In fact, I have nothing but dried meat myself, not even a scrap of tortilla left, to say nothing of candy; I wish I'd only thought of it when I was starting, but the fact is, I came off in a hurry."

"Yes," she cried in a repentant voice, "and I've been talking about myself the whole time. Did you come with my father? Do you know where he is? How did you find us?"

"The Pueblo Indians knew of this place," he answered; "they led me here." He looked cautiously over his shoulder as he spoke, to see if there was any Navajo near trying to play the eavesdropper on them. "Your father and Don Andrés had set out with a strong party of Mexicans before me. They started within an hour after it was known that you were gone. But your father sent word of it all to me up at the pueblo, and I got some of the Indians to join me and started out, too. But we did n't come the same way as Don Andrés's party; we picked up the trail off towards

the Ojo Escondido. You see, my Indians believed that the Navajos certainly were making for this place, and, in short, they led me straight here, and that 's how we seem to have got in ahead of Don Andrés."

"How clever of them to guess the hiding-place!" said she. "And now, shall we go home quite quick? Perhaps we might meet my father and my brother on the way."

"I 've no doubt that 'll be all right now," he said confidently; "I must just fix up things with Mahle-tonkwa first." He paused; there was a question he could not put to her direct, and yet before treating further with the Indian he wished to feel absolutely certain whether he should deal with him as one guilty of unpardonable wrong or not. He tapped the butt of his revolver significantly with his right hand, looked her full in the face for a moment, and then with an abrupt movement he rose to his feet and turned away from her; his right hand half drew the revolver from its holster, and made a gesture as if to offer it to her behind his back, but his eyes were fixed on the group outside the cave. "Now, señorita," he said, "before I go to speak with him, tell me one thing: are you content to live? Are you content to go back in peace to your people? Or else—I guess you can understand me—here 's my revolver for you; you can make an end with that, and I 'll go out to those savages, and then, I swear by the wrath of God, you shall be revenged on some of them, anyhow, before I drop."

"But why?" cried she with a little shudder of surprise at him, so unexpected to her was this suggestion. "They have n't done anything bad to me. I don't want anyone to be killed. They are very ignorant, uncivilised folk, but they treated me as well as they

knew. I 'm sorry if I complained about the dried meat they gave me. Don't begin fighting with them, please,—not on my account. I thought you had made peace. I want to go home."

He turned and looked at her. The naïve simplicity of her language reassured him completely. "All right, señorita," he said, "I 'll see that you get safe home. I 'll go and arrange with Mahletonkwa now. I 'm glad they treated you as well as they knew how. But say," he added, stooping over her and drawing the pistol completely out, "would n't you like me to leave this with you, just in case of accidents? There 's always a sort of feeling of comfort in having a six-shooter handy."

"No, no," said she, making a movement with her hands as if to push the unaccustomed object away from her, "I 've never had one in my life to use. I should n't know what to do with it at all."

Half reluctantly he returned it to its case, thinking what a difference there was between a girl like this and the average Western ranch-woman. American girls who lived on the frontier could shoot ; they were more like men in that way ; they were, comparatively speaking, independent ; whereas this pretty creature depended solely upon him to protect her ; so much the more reason, then, he argued with himself, for being cautious and diplomatic in his dealings with the Navajos now.

"Well then, señorita," he said, "you 'd better stay here a few minutes longer while I go back and speak to Mahletonkwa. I guess it won't take us long to fix things."

He took her hand in his and held it for a moment. *It lay there* in his firm clasp with a confidingness that

thrilled through him ; the sensation came on him as a new discovery. " Why, this was what hands were meant for, to clasp each other." The ten long years of the unnatural divorce from womankind in which he had lived seemed to roll away as a dream. He had forgotten what a girl's hand was like ; a quick impulse came on him to raise it to his lips, to clasp her in his arms and console her, only to be as quickly checked again. It would not be the fair thing ; here she was relying entirely upon him for protection ; it was for him to guard her, and to do no more. Anything else must wait—must wait till she was once more in safety, completely mistress of herself again. But the flood of new ideas for the future sped through his mind with lightning rapidity. In moments of danger and excitement the wheels of thought turn at a rate that seems incredible afterwards.

For one last, long minute he stood there, his hand locked in hers, looking into the deep, dark wells of her eyes. Of what joy had not his desolate past robbed him ? Oh, why had he been blind to his chances all this winter, when he might have looked in her eyes like this any day ; now he had found what made life worth living—and found it, perhaps, too late ! Was it too late ? He would see about that. With a final pressure of her gentle fingers, each one of which he seemed to feel separately pressing his in response, he turned away and strode out of the cave towards the group of Navajos in the meadow.

And who shall say what were the girl's feelings, left thus alone in the cave while her fate was being decided by the men sitting out there in the sun ? Hope lifted her heart high,—hope after despair, like the blue sky after a thunderstorm, unimaginably bright, the hope

of recovered freedom, of return to the longed-for hearth, of the embraces of her father and the dear ones at home. But there were fears too : after all, might not her deliverer fail yet ? he had reached her,—could he rescue her ? would he, single-handed, be able to prevail over these savages ? Was there nothing she might do, weak woman as she was, to help him ? Instinctively her fingers felt within her dress for the beads she wore, and fast flowed her prayers for his success ; when she paused and looked anxiously out she saw him seated on the ground, the rifle in his lap, the Indians in their own style squatting round, and all faces grave with serious debate. It was her fate they were discussing, but it was his, too. In the intense sunlight she could mark the hard-set lines of his face ; he was stubborn with the Indians about something or other ; they wanted something he would not give ? Why would he not give it. “ Oh, give way to them,” she could have cried to him. “ Do let them have it—do. Only make peace, and let us return together ” ; peace, peace, peace, that was what she yearned for, peace and freedom ! But she spoke no word, she knew that she must leave it to him, and once more she fell to her prayers.

CHAPTER XXI

DRIVING A BARGAIN

AND why was this debate between the American and the Navajos so stubborn and tedious?

When two shrewd men are each determined to drive the best bargain he can, and neither trusts the other, the diplomacy between a frontiersman and a redskin may be as lengthy as if it were between rival ambassadors of contending empires. In their secret hearts both Stephens and Mahletonkwa were anxious to come to an understanding, but each thought it politic to simulate comparative indifference, and not to give any advantage to his opponent by betraying undue eagerness.

Stephens demanded at the outset the immediate restoration of the captive to her father, safe and sound. Granted that, he was willing to promise fair compensation for the Navajo who had been slain, and amnesty for the subsequent outrage of carrying off the girl; and also he was ready in person to guarantee these terms. He could offer no less, much as he longed to see her abductors punished, because it was obvious that, as long as they were not secure from retaliation, they would prefer to keep possession of her to the last possible moment, and take their punishment fighting.

To this first demand Mahletonkwa signified his will-

ingness to agree, but only on conditions. Stephens's offer was an amnesty and fair compensation. That was precisely what he wanted. Fair compensation, plus an amnesty. But the question arose, what was fair compensation? and here for a time they split. Stephens maintained that Don Nepomuceno's offer of a hundred and twenty-five dollars cash, was fair. Mahletonkwa would not hear of it. His dead brother was worth a great deal more than that. He had asked a thousand dollars for him, and a thousand dollars he intended to have. Apart from that he had no use for the captive.

"Pay the bill, and take the girl," that was the sum and substance of his argument; "and if her father won't pay, will you?"

Right here the American saw it was essential to make a stand. If he weakly yielded to this preposterous claim, Mahletonkwa would be sure to conclude that he was scared into acquiescence and could have no soldiers or Indian scouts in any force to back him up. That being so, most likely the Navajo would raise his terms, and ask perhaps double, treble, quadruple,—anything he pleased in short,—till the whole affair became a farce! No, Mahletonkwa's thousand-dollar demand was almost certainly a bluff. Then why should n't he try a bluff, too?

"I can't do it, Mahletonkwa," said he with an air of finality, but speaking more in sorrow than in anger, as one who sees good business slipping through his fingers. "I'd like to come to terms first-rate, but I can't meet you there. You're too stiff in your figures. It's not a deal."

He thought of the girl sitting there all alone in the cave, and his kindly heart longed to say, "What's a

thousand dollars, more or less? Hang it all, here, take it! or rather, take my word for it, and let 's be off home." But prudence whispered, No.

Mahletonkwa calmly repeated his demand. He, too, thought it wisest to play the part of the close-fisted trader, and show no hurry to make a bargain.

"Well, look here then, Mahletonkwa and Navajos all," said the American, appealing directly to the cupidity of the followers as well as of the chief. "It's a big thing I've offered you on my own hook already in this matter of the amnesty. It's a big thing for me to say I'll stand between you and Uncle Sam" (he did not say Uncle Sam, but the Great Father at Washington); "but I stick by that, and I'll do it. And I've offered you payment for the dead man, same as Don Nepomuceno, a hundred and twenty-five dollars; and you say it aint enough. Now, I can't meet you the whole way, but I'll raise my offer a bit, and you can take it or leave it. It's my last word." He rose to the level of the part he was playing, and threw himself into it with all the sincerity he was master of. "You see that rifle"—he pointed to the long, heavy, muzzle-loading hunter's rifle that lay beside Mahletonkwa's right knee—"well, I'll give you the weight of that rifle in silver dollars. Me, looking as I do, I'll see that you get them. There's my word upon it. This is my personal offer to compensate you for your dead brother. You shall have silver dollars enough to weigh down that rifle on the scales. I don't know how many that'll take, but it's bound to be a right big pile. Now understand me, you chaps, we'll take a balance, a fair and square balance, and put the rifle in one scale and pour silver dollars into the other till the rifle kicks the beam. *Sabe?*"

The sons of the desert looked one at another, and curious excited sounds came from their lips, and significant gestures were made. Some of them had actually seen scales used to weigh out the rations at Fort Defiance, and they quite understood what they were for, and made the thing clear to the less instructed among them. The American saw that his offer had created an impression, and he did his best to rub it in.

"You 'll find it pay you to accept, Mahletonkwa," he said. "You 'll be able to fix things in grand style with all that silver. Here, let 's have a look at that rifle of yours, and let me heft it." He put out his hand cautiously—no objection was offered ; he laid it on the piece—still no objection ; he raised the rifle slowly on both palms, dandling it, as it were, up and down. "Why, it 's a real heavy gun. It don't weigh less than twelve or thirteen pounds, I reckon. I tell you that 'll come to no end of a lot of silver ; all silver dollars, mind you ; and it 'll take hundreds of them, you bet, to weigh down this gun." He turned his eyes from one to the other of the redskins, and they seemed to understand him as he laid it down again beside the chief.

It was clear that his way of putting it had a great effect on the Navajos. To tell the truth, most of Mahletonkwa's followers had by this time begun to tire of their recent escapade. They had sallied out from their own country under his leadership, at the summons of Ankitona, the headman of their clan, to obtain the redress for the death of a member of their clan called for by their peculiar religion. But so far they had not taken much by their move. They had not as yet got any compensation ; they had carried off a *Mexican girl* ; and now they were beginning to feel that in

doing so they had decidedly risked putting their heads in a noose. They began to believe they were in danger of being surrounded by United States soldiers, here in the Lava Beds, and were likely to have an extremely unpleasant time of it ere long unless they succeeded in escaping to a new hiding-place. The cool confidence shown by this solitary man coming forward so boldly to treat with them convinced them that he must have a strong force behind him. And now he was making an offer of a complete amnesty, plus a heap of silver dollars. First one and then another began to urge Mahletonkwa to close the bargain. He was a chief, of course, and upon him, as such, rested the responsibility of making decisions; but a Navajo chief is practically very much in the hands of his followers. When actually under fire they may obey him well enough, but when it comes to questions of policy, if the greater number are dissatisfied with his schemes or his methods, they simply leave him, and he finds himself deserted. He has no power to coerce them. Call this anarchy, if you will, or call it liberty; it is at all events the very opposite of despotism. No Navajo chief can play the despot; and Mahletonkwa, conscious that his authority was slipping from him, acceded to the terms, which indeed gave him nearly all he wanted.

"*Bueno*, Sooshuamo," said he, using Stephens's Indian name in a friendly way, "I accept your offer, and there shall be peace between us. But you must agree to stay with us when we come out from the Lava Beds, and you must go with us all the way to San Remo for the money, and you must prevent any trouble with the soldiers or with the Mexicans if they try to hurt us. You promise that?"

"Yes," said Stephens slowly, weighing every word

of the Indian's speech, "I 'll promise that. I 'll see you safe to the settlement and pay you the money with my own hands. And if we meet any Americans or Mexicans who are after you, I 'll explain that it is peace, and they are not to attack. I 'll guarantee that much."

"Then," said the Indian, "it is peace between us; peace is made and sure."

"Peace it is," said Stephens, rising; "and now by your leave I 'll go and tell the señorita, and then go and tell my men."

He hurried back to the cave where he had left her, and found her on her knees. He had laughed at the orisons offered up by the Santiago people before blasting the acequia; he did not laugh at hers.

She sprang up at his approach.

"We 've fixed it all right," he said, "so don't you fret, señorita. I was real sorry to have to keep you so long in suspense, but I could n't well help it. I 'll explain all that to you later. But peace is made, and we 're going back to San Remo together, you and me, along with the Navajos, and we 'll start right away. But I 've got to go over to where I left my party yonder in the Lava Beds, and explain the whole arrangement to them. Otherwise there might be considerable of a fuss. Now, don't you fret," he took her hand again to reassure her, "you 'll be all right, and I won't be gone many minutes. You 're sure, now, you won't get scared?"

"If you say you will come back," she answered, "I know you will come back, and I will try to be brave till you do."

With one glad pressure of her hand and one more long look into her eyes he turned away and left her. She

watched his active steps as he hastened across the oasis and sprang up the broken lava rocks beyond. On the summit he turned and looked back in her direction, and waved his hand as a signal to her that all was well. Five minutes later he bounded down into the grassy opening where his mare was feeding with the four horses of the Pueblos. The cacique and the three others ran to meet him.

"How have you succeeded?" exclaimed the cacique. "Who was that shooting? Have you shot any of them?"

"Not me," replied Stephens. "I've been making peace, I have. I found Mahletonkwa had just as lief trade as fight, and a bit more so. 'Ditto,' says I to that, and just talked peace talk to him, and we made things square. Cacique, you were plumb right about Whailahay; they have n't harmed the girl. I've fixed it up with them about compensation for their dear departed, and we're all going back to San Remo together, to take her home and get the silver for them. See?"

The cacique looked rather disconcerted. "I don't want to join company with these Navajos out here," he said decidedly.

"Oh, I did n't mean you," rejoined the American; "I quite understand that you might feel a delicacy in obtruding yourself on them out here in No-man's-land. They might have heard of that little affair of the seven Navajos in the sweat-house, eh? and this might seem a good time and place to pay off old scores?" His spirits had gone up with a bound, and he found it impossible not to chaff the cacique a little. "No, Cacique; you brought me here upon their trail just like a smell-dog, as I wanted you to do, and I've managed

the rest of the business myself. Now, what I want you to do is to take their back trail and meet Don Nepomuceno and his party—they 're sure to have found it again by now and to be following it up—and you tell them how I 've fixed things, and say the señorita 's all right and we 'll meet them in San Remo. Stop, I 'll write it down here on a scrap of paper and you can take it to them ; that 'll be best." He produced a pencil and a small note-book, tore out a leaf and hastily wrote on it his message to the Mexican. "There, Cacique," said he handing it to him, "give that to Don Nepomuceno when you see him, and tell him the whole show. I 'd like to have you wait and meet us at San Remo if you get back there before us. *Hasta luego.*"

He gathered up the riata of the mare, and started to pick his way with her through the Lava Beds to the oasis where the Navajos were camped, while the Pueblos speedily made themselves scarce in the opposite direction.

By the time Stephens reached the camp the Navajos had collected their scanty equipment and bound it on their saddles ; they all took a long drink of pure, cool water from the hidden "tinaja" or rock-cistern, and, leading their animals, made the best of their way over the Lava Beds to the open country. Stephens explained to Mahletonkwa before starting that he had arranged for his party to return to San Remo by the route they came.

"*Bueno*," said Mahletonkwa shortly, "and we will go by another. I know many trails through the sierra; there is one that I like well, and I will take you by it."

"Right you are," said Stephens, "that suits me. *Lead on.*" His object now was to avoid any chance

of a collision between the Navajos and Mexicans till they should meet at San Remo.

Manuelita walked beside him as they followed the winding and difficult trail taken by the Navajos through the Lava Beds, but as soon as they emerged from them and found themselves on the smooth ground beyond, he spread a blanket over the saddle to make it easy for her, and insisted on her riding Morgana while he ran alongside.

After a while the leading Indians came to a halt, and were seen to be examining the ground intently. When Stephens and the girl came up to them he found that they had cut their own trail made by themselves the previous day. But there were more hoof-marks in it now than those of the eleven ponies, and they were busily studying the newer signs. Stephens looked at them, too; they were undoubtedly the tracks of the pursuing party under Don Nepomuceno; it was hard to say just how many of them there were, as they were confused with those of the Indians, and the Mexican horses being barefooted, like the Indian ponies, it was impossible to distinguish them. But there were more than a dozen at least, and not one of them wore shoes.

"No soldiers in this party," said Mahletonkwa, looking up at Stephens suspiciously. United States army horses are always shod, as he well knew.

"Certainly not," answered the American unhesitatingly. "These are not the tracks of my party. I never was over this piece of ground before. My scouts cut your trail farther on."

"You had the Santiago scouts with you?" said the Navajo; "I was sure of that when you came to the Lava Beds so quick. Which of them did you have?—the cacique?" His dark eyes snapped as he men-

tioned him. "Miguel, perhaps, that tall, slim one with the scar on his cheek?" He knew a good deal about the Santiago folk; after the submission of the Navajos had ended the long wars, there had been some intercourse between the former enemies.

Stephens thought it better not to give any names. "Oh, I got some good trailers," he said easily; "but there are other Pueblos besides Santiago, and there are trailers in all of them. Cochiti has men who are first-class on reading signs."

"I know you had that Santiago cacique," said Mahletonkwa cunningly.

"Then if you think so, you'd better ask him to tell you about it when we get back to the settlement," rejoined the American.

They entered the sierra a little before nightfall, and were soon involved in a difficult and tortuous way amidst pine-crowned crags and precipices. Sometimes their horses' feet clattered upon shady slopes of débris; at times they trod softly upon a padded carpet of fir-needles. They were traversing a little cañon just after sunset, when, nearly two hundred yards away on the opposite side, the forms of a herd of deer were silhouetted against the fading sky.

Instinctively Stephens threw up his rifle to his shoulder; he got a bead as well as he could, though it was too dark to pick the exact spot on the animal's side as he pressed the trigger, and at the sharp report the band of dark forms disappeared as if by magic, but the loud "thud" of the bullet proclaimed that one of them had been struck. Instantly he and three of the Navajo young men dashed on foot across the little gorge and scaled the opposite steep, Faro leading the way. The *bulldog* nosed around for a moment where the deer had

been, and as the climbers emerged on top they heard him give one joyful yelp as he darted forward on the scent; two minutes later they heard his triumphant bark, and when they got up to the spot they found him over the dead carcass of a yearling buck, shot through the lungs. It had run some five hundred yards before it dropped, and the bulldog coming up had seized it by the throat and finished the business.

The Indians were loud in praise of the dog, as their knives rapidly and skilfully dressed and cut up the game, while Stephens looked on and rewarded his pet with the tit-bits. All three of the Navajos spoke Spanish well enough for him to understand them as they praised the dog, but when they turned over the deer, and found the place where the conical bullet had come out on the other side, they changed from Spanish into Navajo, and significant laughter followed as they pointed out to one another the two holes, and then pointed to Stephens's rifle. Suddenly it flashed across him that they had got a joke on about something, and that it was not a thing new to him. Their manner made him think instantly of the day when he drove the nail, and Mahletonkwa pointed to his Winchester and told the funny story—funny, that is to say, for the Navajos—about the murder of the prospector. Though he understood no word of what they said, their gestures were too full of meaning for him to mistake them.

"I say," said he abruptly, but with seeming carelessness, "aint this the place that Mahletonkwa told that story about? About the man who was shot with his own rifle, you know?"

The young Indian who was stooping over the game stopped and withdrew his hand from the deer. "What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Well," said Stephens, "he said it happened up in these mountains, and I heard him say, also, that he was particularly fond of this trail we're on. So I just guessed it might have been pretty nigh where we are now."

"So it was," said the Indian, whom Stephens had learned to know as Kaniache, "it was right up this gulch where it opens out above." They had crossed a divide in their chase after the wounded buck, and were in another little cañon not unlike the one where they had left the rest of the party. The darkness was increasing every minute, but the Indian knew precisely where they were. Stephens marked the place in his memory as well as he could, and resolved that he would return to it as soon as might be, to seek out and bury the bones of the unfortunate victim of Navajo treachery and cunning.

They gathered up the meat of their quarry, and hastening back to where the rest of the party were waiting for them, they pushed on for fully two hours by the light of the moon, in spite of the difficulty of the way. Camp was made at last by a little stream in a park, and a fire was lighted, though Mahletonkwa was so suspicious of being followed that he put a couple of scouts to watch their back trail and signal the approach of any possible pursuers.

Stephens sat down by the fire, and set to work roasting pieces of the venison on spits of willow for Manuelita and himself. She was tired, but not exhausted, and he could not but wonder at the power she exhibited of enduring fatigue, she who ordinarily took no more exercise than that involved in doing her share of the labours of the household, varied by walking over to the store or paying a visit to a neighbour. But she came of a

tireless race. It might be said of the Spanish *conquistadores*, that for them—

“The hardest day was never too hard, nor the longest day too long,”

and this endurance has descended to the women sprung from them as well as to their sons.

Stephens aired for her benefit the only wraps he had to offer her, the blankets that had been under and over the saddle; but he went to a clump of young pines growing near, and with his hunting-knife hewed off a quantity of the small shoots from the ends of the boughs.

“You ’ll never guess in a month of Sundays, señorita, what we call these on the frontier,” said he, as he proceeded to arrange them in neat layers, to make for her an elastic couch. “Give it up? We call them ‘Colorado feathers,’ and they ’re no slouches in the way of feathers neither. Besides, they say the smell of turpentine ’s mighty wholesome. The doctors in Denver recommend camping out to the consumptives who come out for their health, just that they may get the benefit of them. Spruce makes the best, and it ’s the most aromatic.”

“Here, you get out, Faro,” he apostrophised his dog, who had as usual promptly taken possession of the blankets as soon as they were spread down, “you get out of that, that ’s not your place;” and he pushed him off.

“Oh, don’t hurt him !” cried the girl; “he likes it; let him stay.”

“Well, all right, then, señorita,” he said, pleased that his pet should find favour, “if you don’t mind having him there, he ’ll lie at your feet and keep them

warm ; and now you 'd better lie down and rest yourself all you can, for we aint home yet, and you can bet it 's a ' rocky road to Dublin ' through this sierra that we 've got to go to-morrow '' ; and with these words he turned away to the fire.

" But," cried she, looking at the provision he had made for her, " you have kept no blanket for yourself ; you must take one or you will freeze." His generosity distressed her.

" No fear," he returned without looking at her, while he deliberately settled himself down beside the fire and lit his pipe with a coal, " no fear, señorita. I 'm calculating to keep guard anyhow, and there 's lots of firewood here. That 's the beauty of a mountain camp."

" No, thank you, Mahletonkwa," this was spoken to the chief, who at this juncture came and offered him a blanket, being anxious to conciliate the man whom he now depended on for so much, " not for me, thank you ; *muchas gratias* ; I 'm all right. I 'm going to keep this fire warm, and watch the ' Guardias ' circle round the North Star." The " Warders," two bright stars of the Little Bear, act as the hour-hand of a clock which has the Pole for its centre, and by them a frontiersman on night-herd knows when his watch begins and ends.

The Indians, suspicious as ever of a possible attack, kept aloof from the fire, and lay down to sleep at a little distance outside the ring of light. Stephens established himself on the windward side of the fire, and set up the skin of the buck he had shot as a wind-break behind his back against the chill night air of the sierra.

Tired as he was with his long day's walk on foot, he

lay there, warming first one side and then the other, and replenishing the fire at intervals, while he listened to the well-known sounds that from time to time broke the silence of the hours of watch—the sough of the night wind in the pines, like waves beating upon a far-off shore ; the strange, nocturnal love-call of an unseen bird ; the long-drawn, melancholy howl of a night-wandering wolf, seeking his meat abroad ; and once his ears thrilled at the agonising death-cry of a creature that felt the sudden grip of the remorseless fangs of the beast of prey.

“ Beasts of prey,” he mused, “ yes, that ’s just what we humans are too, the most of us, and we take our turn to be victims. Killers and killed. Well, if anybody ’s to blame for it, I suppose it ’s the nature of man.”

Going back in his mind over the events of the day, he recalled the fierce desire to shed blood that had possessed him when he left the cacique and his fellows and set out to handle these Navajos alone. It seemed as if that much-angered man with the tense-strung nerves was some other than he. Now, peace was made, the captive was safe ; and as he looked at the girl sleeping there unharmed, dreaming, it might well be, of her safe return home on the morrow, he felt a sort of mechanical wonder at the rage that had then filled his heart. He thought, too, of the shots that had been fired at him by the Navajo,—he had not cared to inquire which one it was,—and in imagination he felt the hot lead splash on his cheek again. He had been mighty near the jumping-off place that time, sure. And yet it had been all about nothing, so to speak. It had been a sort of mistake. He had wanted peace, really, and so had they ; yet how near they had come to turning that little oasis

into a slaughter-house. Fate was a queer thing. He looked up at the velvet black of the sky overhead and the endless procession of the stars. The moon had gone, but Jupiter still blazed in the western heavens. What did it all mean, and what was one put here for, anyway? He confessed to himself that he did not know; that he had no theory of life; he lived from day to day, doing the work that lay next him, and doing it with his might; but in the watches of the night he brooded now—not for the first time—over the old problem, “Was life worth living, and if so, why?” To that question he was not sure that he had any answer to give. Perhaps the secret might lie in caring for somebody very much, and at present he cared for nobody—very much—so far as he knew. Suppose that Navajo bullet had found its billet in his brain, thus it seemed to him in these morbid imaginings of the weary night watch, he would be sleeping now the last sleep of all, like that other victim in the cañon over yonder; and what was there in that that he should mind it? Perhaps it would have been better so—perhaps, yes, perhaps.

CHAPTER XXII

A WOUNDED MAN

WHEN the triumphant cacique rode off with the daughter he had recaptured on the banks of the Rio Grande, he left Felipe stretched upon the ground, breathless from his last desperate rush and half stupefied with despair. The angry voice of the cacique sounded farther and farther off; the hoof-beats of the horses died away in the distance. Felipe lifted his head from the sand; he was alone under the wide sky by the great river. The monotonous rush of the water seemed to intensify the stillness; the sun blazed down out of the blue sky; everything was at peace except the despairing, rebellious heart of the boy alone in the desert. How could everything go on so quietly when such a wicked thing had just been done? Why did not the cacique's horse stumble and fall and kill him as he deserved? Why was life so full of injustice and cruelty?

Poor Felipe! The first time that it is brought home to us that the scheme of events has not been arranged for our personal satisfaction, nay, that it may involve our extreme personal misery, is a hard trial—too hard sometimes for a philosopher; how much more so for a poor, untaught Indian boy.

"Cruel, savage, barbarous," he groaned, as he

thought of the blows that had rained down upon the shrinking form of his sweetheart. "Poor little thing! Poor little Josefa! I can do nothing for you now; I had best go and drown myself—there is nothing left to live for."

He got up and walked deliberately towards the river.

But before he reached the brink he had had time to reflect. "Nothing left to live for?" he thought. "Yes, there is. I could kill Salvador first. I could get my father's gun and do it. I don't care if they do hang me afterwards."

He knelt down on the river-bank, and bending his head over the water he dipped his left hand in, and by a quick throwing movement of the wrist tossed a continuous stream of water into his mouth in the wonderful Indian fashion which gives quite the effect of a dog lapping. As he quenched his burning thirst, and felt the cool, refreshing dash of the water against his face, his spirit rose.

"I'll go straight back," he said to himself, with a dangerous expression on his set face. "I don't need any rest. I'll be there before the sun's much past noon, and he'll be dead before night."

He washed the blood from his right arm and examined the wound. The bullet had struck him between the elbow and shoulder and had passed out again without touching the bone. The second shot had missed him. He tore some strips from his shirt, and bound it up as well as he could with his left hand aided by his teeth.

He drew his belt tighter to keep off hunger, and drank again before facing the long leagues of waterless desert between him and Santiago. He looked at the rolling river and at the farther shore where he had so

longed to be. "*Rio maldito!*" he cried. "Accursed stream, what happiness you have robbed me of! what misery you have wrought us! Why could you not wait only one day longer?" He turned away, set his face towards the pueblo, and began his weary journey.

He soon found the weight of his arm grow more and more painful as his pulse beat faster with movement, and he had to carry it across his body, supporting it with the other. But he pushed on with a steady, untiring gait, showing the marvellous power of his race to bear pain and fatigue and hunger and thirst. On all the Western frontier there is no white man that is not proud to be credited with "Indian endurance."

Curiously enough, he felt no fear. The cacique's threat to kill him did not affect his purpose in the slightest. He had recoiled from instant death when the pistol cracked in his face, but that was only instinctive, defenceless as he was against a man with fire-arms. He felt no shame at having done so. It did not seem to him cowardly to avoid being killed if he could. But he did not flinch for a moment when he thought of returning to the pueblo. No doubt Salvador would try to carry out his threat. "Well," thought he, "I must be beforehand with him. If I can't hold my father's gun with this sore arm, I must get Tito's pistol; Tito is my friend; he will not be afraid to let me have it."

The sun rose high in the heavens and beat down upon him as he toiled along, parching him with thirst. He was travelling the same trail back to Santiago that he had traversed the night before. The tracks of the horses going and returning were plainly visible. But what a change for him! A few hours before he had

ridden that way feeling every inch a man, with his sweetheart in his arms and the happiness of a lifetime within his grasp ; and now— As the thought stung him he pulled himself together and forced his weary feet to carry him on faster.

But anger had made him overestimate his own powers, in declaring that he would be back, and the cacique dead, before night. His strength gave out, and he had to lie down time and again to recover force enough to go on at all. Night overtook him, and he was compelled to stop and light a fire under the lee of a cedar bush, and rest himself in the warmth of it till dawn. Then he set forward, once more, slowly and stiffly, but ever pressing onwards, with his face turned towards the village that was his home, the village where his sweetheart must now be lying at the mercy of her pitiless father. What might not he have done to her ere this ! That torturing thought goaded him to renewed efforts.

When he reached the edge of the mesa he was crossing, he looked down into the sandy valley that separated him from the next one ; and there right below him, coming at brisk pace, was a mounted Indian. He instantly crouched down to watch if the new-comer were friend or foe ; but in a minute he sprang from his concealment. It was Tito,—Tito on the mule of the American.

With a joyful cry he ran to meet him. Tito knew him and shouted back in welcome. " Why, Felipe ! " he cried, " I was looking for your body, and here you are alive. Jump up and I'll take you right back. But you're wounded," he added, seeing his arm bound up. " Is it bad ? Let me help you up," and he jumped off to help his friend to mount to the saddle.

"Salvador gave me a shot," answered Felipe as he got on with Tito's help; "but it's not very bad."

Tito turned the mule's head round towards Santiago, and jumping on behind struck out for home. The tough little mule made light of the double burden, and rejoicing in the prospect of going back to his beloved mare set off briskly.

"Now tell me all about it," said Tito eagerly.

"Tell me first," answered Felipe, "where is Salvador? What has he done with Josefa?"

"Salvador is made prisoner by the Americano," replied Tito, "for killing you. They think you're dead over there, and they've given Josefa to Sooshiuamo, hoping to keep him from taking the cacique to Santa Fé. He asked for her." Felipe's heart gave a sudden bound. He knew of course that there were white men in many of the Indian tribes with half-breed families, but he had never thought of Don Estevan as that sort of man.

"*Valgame Dios!*" he cried. "What does he want her for?"

"Who knows?" replied Tito guardedly. "Perhaps he wants someone to cook for him and to take care of the house when he is away. It was he that stopped the cacique from beating her."

"*Valgame Dios!*" said Felipe again. He hardly heard the rest of Tito's story. He was filled with new fears. Was everyone against him? Was the Americano, of all men in the world, to be the one to supplant him? He remained silent a while, but his suspicions were too strong to be entirely concealed.

"How did he ask for her?" he inquired. "Tell me, Tito."

"He said the pueblo had agreed to give him any-

thing he wanted for blasting the rock," answered Tito; "and he said that he wanted her. So Salvador gave her to him. They all told Salvador to do it, for they thought then he would n't take him to Santa Fé. They all agreed to it. Sooshiuamo has put her with Reyna. She 's there now."

"Tito," said Felipe very earnestly, "will you lend me your pistol?"

"What for?" said Tito.

Felipe hesitated. Two conflicting plans of vengeance were struggling within him. Then he answered, "The cacique said he 'd kill me if I came back. If he has a pistol, I ought to have one. It was n't fair there by the river."

"Nonsense," said Tito; "he 's not going to kill you. Did n't Sooshiuamo make him a prisoner because he thought he had? Why, he was going to take him to Santa Fé to be hanged for it. The cacique was frightened, I can tell you. He won't touch you now, Felipe. Sooshiuamo won't let him."

"Oh, I 'm sick of hearing of Sooshiuamo," broke in Felipe impatiently. "Why won't you lend it to me, Tito? You used to."

"That was to go after wild cows," said Tito. "Now I don't know what you want."

"I want to defend myself," said Felipe in a hurt tone.

"But there 's no need to," said Tito. "Never mind what Salvador said. He was angry then. He is frightened now. Don't you mind him. It 'll be all right. I 'm taking you straight back to Sooshiuamo, just as he told me. He 'll manage it."

It was easy to see who was Tito's hero now.

They came to the edge of the last mesa and looked

down upon the Santiago Valley. Tito jumped off to ease the mule, who cleverly picked his way down the steep, rocky escarpment. At the bottom he sprang on again, and they cantered in the last league over the lowlands.

Felipe resigned himself to fate. "If he wrongs her, I 'll have his heart's blood," he thought, but the imaginary "he" was not the cacique.

They reached the corrals, and they heard the cry raised of "Tito 's coming! Tito 's here!" They pushed on through the crowd to the American's house, and Tito, proud of his success, sprang off before the door.

"See, Sooshiuamo, I have brought him," he shouted out joyfully, thinking he was there, as he aided his friend to dismount. "Here's Felipe. He's not dead, but he has a bullet wound."

He pulled the latch-string, but the door refused to open. It was locked.

"I reckon you must shout a bit louder if you want Mr. Sooshiuamo, as you fellers call him," remarked a man who lounged against the wall near Reyna's door, which was only a few yards from Stephens's. "He aint to home just now."

"Why, where is he?" cried the boys in concert.

"Gone off with the cacique," answered Backus, for it was he; "mebbe he thought change of air would be wholesome after all that rumpus they 're bin having this morning"; he laughed an evil laugh.

"Oh," cried Tito, "I suppose he's done as he said he would, taken him to Santa Fé for killing Felipe. But why could n't he wait a little? Here I've brought him back Felipe no more dead than I am."

"No, nor he aint taken him to Santa Fé, neither," rejoined the Texan, with a malicious pleasure in mysti-

fyng the boys. He had gone straight to the cacique's house in his dripping garments after his fall into the ditch, and had waited there, meditating revenge, while they were being dried for him, during which interval he had obtained a full account of all that had taken place, including the fact that Josefa had been transferred to the prospector and was now under his protection at Reyna's. He had just walked over to Reyna's, in the hope of interviewing the girl, when the mule with the two boys on his back came in sight.

"All that gas of his about Santa Fé was nothing but a blind," he went on; "what he wanted was to get Miss Josefa for himself. And he's done it, too." He noted the flash in Felipe's eyes as he said this. "Yes, he's got her bottled up tight, inside here." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the house against which he was leaning.

"But that's only to save her from her father," exclaimed Tito hotly. "He was thrashing her like fury, and Sooshuamo stopped him and took her away from him." Tito did not feel quite sure himself what Stephens's ultimate object might have been,—Americans were such very unaccountable people anyhow,—but he was not going to have this other American saying things about the man who was his particular hero at the moment, without sticking up for him.

"Jes' so," rejoined the Texan, "he's got her away from her daddy, and he's got her for himself. That's the size of it exactly."

Felipe said nothing, but the rage and despair which had taken possession of his heart made him perfectly convinced that the base innuendo of the Texan was only the simple truth. Tito made another effort to withstand the sinister meaning of the words.

"But he has n't taken her to live with him," he said. "She 's not in his house ; it 's locked up."

"Yes," said Backus, "for a very good reason. He 's gone off hunting Navajos, and he 's too jealous of her to leave her there by herself. So he 's stowed her away, nice and handy, with his most particular friend next door. See ? Why, it 's as clear as mud."

"What 's he gone hunting Navajos for, though ?" asked the puzzled young Indian.

"What, don't you know ?" said the Texan. "Oh, I suppose the news came after you 'd started. Well, there 's a pretty kettle of fish. The Navajos have bagged Miss Sanchez, and run her off Lord knows where, and Mr. Sooshiuamo, instead of taking his newly made father-in-law off to jail, is using him as a smell-dog to run their trail. He and Miss Josefa's daddy are as thick as thieves now. Aint it so, what I 've said ?" and he appealed to the other Indians standing round for confirmation.

The incredulous Tito appealed to them, too ; but the Texan had stated the fact correctly enough ; and as for the interpretation he put on them, well, that was a matter where everyone must judge for himself. Opinions varied as to that, but the general verdict was in Backus's favour.

Felipe threw up his unwounded arm in adjuration. "If he takes her from me," he cried, "my curse upon him from the bottom of my heart."

"You seem to take it hard, young man," said Backus eyeing him keenly. "Say, though, you 're looking rather dilapidated. What 's wrong with you anyway ?"

"He 's got a bullet in his arm," answered Tito for him.

"Then why the mischief could n't you say so before, you plumb idiot?" exclaimed the Texan, who instantly divined that here was a chance to make friends with the youth who would now and henceforward be Stephens's bitterest enemy. "Come in here, young 'un, and let me look at it," he said, addressing Felipe; "it's a pity if I don't know a thing or two about gunshot wounds." He knocked at Reyna's door, and when she appeared he said apologetically, "Won't you let me bring in a wounded man who wants seeing to?"

Reyna did not want either him or Felipe, seeing that she had already one invalid in the house, in the shape of Josefa, whom she was nursing in an inner room, and she particularly objected to any complications with Felipe in Stephens's absence. But to be hospitable is a cardinal virtue of the race, and she admitted them in spite of the difficulties she felt. After all, Josefa was safely stowed away out of sight and hearing.

The Texan placed the boy on the ground close to the light, and with the rudé skill of the frontier undid the makeshift bandage. The wound was naturally somewhat inflamed; he cleansed it with water and clean rags supplied by Reyna, and did it up again for the patient. "There aint no bullet in that," he said, "or I'm a Dutchman. But you're liable to have an ugly arm, if you don't look after it properly. Now you listen to me. You go right home to your mammy, and have a bite to eat, and lie down and keep quiet. Keep plumb still, d' you mark me, and don't go talking. Rest's what you're wanting this minute. But I can't dress your wound properly here, for I have n't the right stuff with me. I've got some rare good stuff at the store, though, that works like a charm. Now, you come down to me there, this evening when you're

rested, and I'll fix it for you good. You do jes' as I tell you, and I'll make a well man of you yet. *Sabe?*" He helped the boy to his feet and led him to the door.

"But I want to see Josefa," said the boy, addressing Reyna; "I've got something to say to her. Where is she?"

"You'd better go right along and lie down," said Backus, disregarding the interruption; "you aint fit to talk to her now, nor she aint fit to talk to you."

"Let me see her," cried the boy passionately. "I must."

"Hush!" said the old squaw severely, "she's asleep. You'll disturb her. Do what the kind gentleman says, and go home."

Backus had said not a word to a soul as to his fracas with Stephens, nor had it been observed by any of the Pueblo people, so that Reyna had no idea of his hostility to Stephens, to whom she was devoted. Had she known of it she would not have called him "kind gentleman," nor even let him inside her door. Now, however, she backed him in starting Felipe for home under Tito's charge, the Texan reiterating his injunctions to keep quiet when he got there. Then he turned quickly to the mistress of the house. "And how's the other invalid getting on? How's the new Mrs. Stephens?"

"She does very well, now," said the squaw cautiously.

"Don't you think I'd better prescribe for her?" asked the Texan; "I'm a boss doctor, me, for wounds and bruises"; in saying which he did but speak the truth. "Come on, let's have a look at her."

"She's resting now," said the squaw. "Better she try to go to sleep."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the storekeeper; "it 'll do her all the good in the world to see me. Come along, old lady, trot her out."

But though Mr. Backus had had reason for his boast when he declared that he had had a good deal of experience of Indians, and that too of different sorts, he found now that he knew precious little of Pueblo Indians, and next to nothing of the nature of the Pueblo squaw. This stout, jolly, comfortable-looking old lady (not so very old, either), whom he had imagined he could order about by virtue of his position as one of the superior sex as well as of the superior race, proved to have a decided will of her own. It was her house he was in, her very own, and, what was more, she was mistress in it, and did not for one moment mean to abdicate. She had no notion of being told to do this or that by anybody so long as she was inside her own door, and this she let him know. She was a woman of the Turquoise clan, and the Turquoise women owned that block of buildings, and their motto was, "What 's mine 's my own."

The astonished storekeeper found he had to swallow the fact that Josefa was invisible to him for the present, and he was sharp enough to see that it would do him not the slightest good to bluster. So he kept a civil tongue in his head, thanked Reyna profusely for allowing him to dress Felipe's wound in her house, and promised to call again soon. Then he went off to the cacique's stable and got his own horse, which was waiting for him there, and rode slowly home revolving fresh schemes of revenge.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PICNIC PARTY

THE discovery of Felipe seemed quite a godsend to Backus as he wended his way through the Indian lands back to San Remo. Had he had a pistol on him when Stephens struck him that morning he would have shot him, or tried to shoot him, then and there. But now that his fit of passion had gone by, he determined to pay the prospector out in his own way and at his own time. Looking at the matter in cooler blood he could see that he would let himself in for a lot of trouble if he killed Stephens with his own hand. In the first place, there would be a trial, and lawyers to be paid, and that would come expensive, very expensive ; and, secondly, Stephens had friends capable of going on the war-path. These confounded redskin allies of his seemed so unaccountably devoted to him that they might take it into their heads to perforate anyone who harmed him in a highly unpleasant manner, to judge not only by Tito's talk, but by the action of this stubborn old squaw, who had flatly told him at last that he should n't even set eyes on Stephens's girl in his absence. And now here was just what he wanted, an instrument prepared to his hand. With a little judicious spurring, a little help on the sly, Felipe would be quite ready to stick a knife in Stephens's back some night, or blow

the top of his head off, and he, Backus, would stand entirely clear—ay, need not even lose the trade of the pueblo. Really it seemed quite providential. The only question that occurred to him was, whether Felipe would come down to see him, which would be most convenient, or whether he would have to go back to the pueblo to hunt for him. "But there 's small fear of that," said he, as his horse splashed through the Santiago River before entering San Remo ; "that sore arm of his 'll bring him along, if not to-night, then to-morrow, certain."

Mr. Backus was exceedingly accurate in his diagnosis of Felipe's frame of mind, as well as of the condition of his arm. The young Indian obeyed him implicitly in the matter of going home, taking food, and lying down to obtain a good rest. He rose again later in the afternoon, and went for the second time to Reyna's house, only to find that for him there was to be no admission. Reyna was perfectly clear that until Stephens came back and settled what was to be done, the less the young people saw of each other the better it would be for all concerned. She was very friendly, rather amusing, and perfectly inexorable. As to the health of her patient, all Felipe could learn was that she was getting along nicely, thank you, and was in absolute need of rest, and would be so for a day or two longer,—until Stephens came back in fact. At present she would not even go out of doors.

All which did but root more firmly in Felipe's mind the conviction that Josefa was destined for Stephens, and that this was why the door was barred against him. Nursing his wrath, he turned away to meet Tito. For the second time he tried to borrow

Tito's pistol, which that discreet young man entirely declined to let him have so long as he continued in his present frame of mind.

"You can't want it to defend yourself, Felipe," he said very decidedly, "for the cacique is n't here."

"Yes," said the boy sullenly, "but he 'll be back in two or three days, and I 'm not going to have him shooting at me again, and I not have anything to shoot back with."

"Pooh!" said Tito, "don't you fret yourself. He 's not going to bother you any more, you may be sure. Take it easy; that 's all past and gone."

But Felipe declined to take it easy. Finding Tito's mind was quite made up, he went back to his mother's house, and announced his intention of going down to San Remo to get his arm dressed by the storekeeper. He took his blanket with him, and added, as he started, that if Backus would let him sleep down there, he was n't coming back till the morrow, or even later. He reached the store at dark, and found Mr. Backus at home.

"Come right in," said the Texan, as the boy with his blanket wrapped round him appeared in the doorway of the house after knocking, "come right in and set down. I was expecting you." He placed him in the light of a kerosene lamp, undid the arm, and dressed the wound again with some stinging stuff out of a bottle that made it smart. But the sharp throb of the wound gave no such stab to Felipe as the inquiry, casually dropped, "Wal', have you called on Mrs. Stephens to pay your respects yet?"

The boy confessed his vain attempt.

"Hah!" said the Texan, "so they 're keeping her locked up tight, eh? Well, well; that 's rather tough

on you. But I don't wonder at it, now that Mr. Stephens and the cacique are in cahoots together. Of course they don't want anybody smelling around there when they are off and out of the way. No, they've got her there and they mean to keep her. But I know what I'd do if a man stole my gal away from me and shut her up."

"What would you do?" inquired Felipe, with averted eyes. He had his head turned to one side, and was looking down at the hole in his arm which Backus was dressing.

"Me!" said Backus, "I'd fill the hound's hide so full of holes that it would n't hold shucks. That's what I'd do. And I'd lay for him, too, and get him when he was n't expecting it. A man like that, as would steal another man's gal away from him, don't deserve any more show than a mad dog."

"I have n't got a pistol,"—Felipe's voice trembled a little as he said this,—"but I could buy one, perhaps, if it was n't too dear, if I knew of one for sale."

"A knife's surer than a pistol," said the Texan cautiously; "though I allow a feller that's only got his left arm to use is rather at a disadvantage with a knife. So he is with a pistol, unless he practises shooting left-handed. However, if he gets up close, and takes his man from behind when he aint looking out for it, he can't hardly miss, and he had n't ought to need a second shot."

"Do you know of anyone that's got a pistol for sale?" said the boy earnestly.

"Wal, yes," said the Texan, "I do happen to know of a very good pistol that's for sale. In fact, a man left it with me to be disposed of." Mr. Backus did not deal in firearms, but second-hand ones some-

times came in his way as part payment of a debt. "I could sell it for him, and afford to take a very reasonable price for it. It's a first-class weapon." He finished tying up the wounded arm, and released his patient.

"Thank you, sefior, a thousand thanks for all your kindness," said Felipe, rising. "May I see the pistol?"

The storekeeper took a key from his pocket, unlocked a chest, and produced a heavy, old-fashioned, muzzle-loading Colt's revolver in a leather holster. He drew it out; it was well smeared with grease. He pulled the hammer to half-cock, and spun the cylinder round, click, click, click, with his finger.

"She's not new," he remarked; "but she goes like clockwork, and she'll throw a conical ball through four inches of pine wood. I've tried her at a mark, too, and she'll hit the size of a silver dollar at ten yards every pop, if you're man enough to hold her steady." He handed it over to Felipe, who examined it with great care. Though he had never owned a weapon of his own, he knew how to handle one. They did not read or write in the pueblo, but they had compulsory education for all that; every boy learned two necessary things, the use of weapons and the use of tools. And they never required any salaried attendance officer to drive them to school. The boy drew back the hammer with his left thumb, holding the barrel with his stiff right hand, and squinted down the sights.

"That's right," said Backus approvingly, "I see you know all about it. Now that pistol cost fifteen dollars new, and I can sell it to you for four dollars and a half, and there's a little ammunition that goes with it, thrown in. It's as good as new, too; these Colt's

pistols never wear out, but they 've got a new style now with copper cartridges, and that 's why these old-fashioned ones are cheap." It was all quite true. Mr. Backus loved truth, it got you such a useful reputation ; he never lied except when he thought it would pay him, and then he could lie like a gas-meter.

Felipe produced the cash, and slipped his belt through the loop of the holster. He felt himself more a man now ; from this time forward he would go " heeled."

" No use your going back all that way to the pueblo," said the storekeeper, " and it won't do your arm any good. I can let you sleep here in an outhouse, and I 've lots of sheepskins I 've traded for that you can spread down for a bed." The Indians despise soft mattresses, but love to lie on skins.

For the next three days Felipe was Backus's guest. His wounded arm made rapid progress towards recovery, and the boy spent his days either squatting in the store with his blanket drawn round him, silently noting all that went on, or in lounging round the corral, looking after Backus's horse and practising aiming at a mark with his new toy. He could not afford to waste his ammunition, but Backus showed him how to put on old caps to save the tubes from the blow of the hammer, and by snapping it thus he acquired a useful familiarity with his weapon.

For three days no tidings came to San Remo of Manuelita and her captors, or of their pursuers. But on the fourth morning two young Mexicans came spurting in from the westward, and reined up their weary horses before one of the San Remo corrals. They were soon surrounded by eager questioners, boys and women mostly, and the storekeeper and Felipe were not long

in joining the throng. The young men felt their own importance, and dealt out their information gradually. No, there had been nothing to call a fight, and no one was hurt, though there had been some shots fired. Yes, the Señorita Manuelita Sanchez was all right. She and the Americano, Don Estevan, and the Navajos were all coming home together in one party ; and Don Nepomuceno and Don Andrés with the rest of the Mexicans were also coming home together, but by a different route, and along with them were the Santiago trailers. The various incidents of the expedition,—of the loss of the trail and of the finding it again, of the renewed pursuit almost to the verge of the Lava Beds, and of the meeting there between the party of Mexicans and the returning Santiago trailers, who announced to them that Stephens, with Manuelita and the Navajos, were already on their way back to San Remo,—all these things had to be related at length and with impressive detail. And then, their horses unsaddled and attended to, these young men, who had been riding a good part of the night, slipped away to contrive an interview with their sweethearts, to get quickly back to whom they had ridden far and fast. The young men of San Remo were neither laggards in love nor dastards in war.

“ I think, mebbe, if I was you,” said Backus to the young Indian, “ I ’d contrive not to be here just when they arrive, but go off somewheres and keep out of the way. If you have a notion in your head to do anything, better not let folks see you, as it were, waiting for anyone—you understand ? ”

Felipe understood perfectly. In the past three days he and Backus had come to understand one another only too well ; there was no formal conspiracy between

them ; Backus was much too cautious to give himself entirely away to any confederate, more especially to one so green and inexperienced as this Indian boy, but each was perfectly aware of the other's feelings towards the prospector.

" Why should n't you jes' go back to your folks for the rest of the day," continued Backus, " and let 'em know how you 're getting on ? Likely enough the cacique and his son-in-law " (he always alluded to Stephens now as the cacique's son-in-law) " will be going on up there too, and you might chance to hear something interesting if you lie low. You can come back down here again after dark if you like, and I 'll do up your arm for you as usual."

Felipe took the hint, and was off at once. The rest and good food, for Backus treated him extremely well—it was part of his game—had quite restored his strength, and except for having to carry his right arm in a sling he felt fit for anything.

Later on in the morning arrived the main party of Mexicans, headed by Don Nepomuceno and his son. They dispersed to their different houses to dispose of their horses and be welcomed back by their families, but they did not lay aside their arms, and it was not very long before they reassembled at the Sanchez house in expectation of the arrival of the other party. The cacique and his three fellow-tribesmen of Santiago preferred not to await the return of the Navajos, but pushed on at once for their own pueblo.

But, for the waiting Mexicans, hour after hour passed and no sign of the Navajos or of Manuelita and Stephens appeared. The sun climbed high in the heavens and sank slowly to the west, and still their coming was delayed. True, their exact route was not known, but

it was guessed (and correctly guessed) that it was the short cut through the sierra, and if so it was calculated that they should have arrived long before noon. The anxiety became painful. All sorts of theories to account for the delay were started. There had been a quarrel between Stephens and the Navajos ; they had killed him and Manuelita, or had at least made them captives and carried them farther into the wilderness to a securer hiding-place. Or Stephens and Manuelita had made their escape from them during the night, and were now in hiding in the sierra, besieged there, perchance in some cave, and defended by the deadly rifle of the American. Many possible explanations were discussed, and many tales of Navajo treachery recalled to mind ; but there was nothing to be done except wait.

Yet the cause of the delay was perfectly simple, and the result of the merest accident. When daylight came, and the sleeping band of Navajos awoke to find that four of their horses had strayed off, the owners immediately started on their trail to recover them, and till they returned Mahletonkwa declined to budge. He absolutely refused to divide his party, or to allow the American and the girl to proceed alone. Under the circumstances there was nothing to be done but wait, and Stephens determined to make the best of it. Hardy as he was, he could not but feel the strain of the efforts he had been making, followed as they were by a whole night on guard. He now left Manuelita to tend the fire and keep a daylight watch ; he threw himself on the ground, wrapped in his blanket, under the shade of a bush, drew his hat over his eyes, and in two minutes was fast asleep.

It was well into the afternoon when the four Navajos rode bareback into camp with their truant steeds

that had caused all this delay. Manuelita saw them arrive, and was glad to think that the hour for their final departure had come ; once more she looked across where Stephens was still sleeping, and seeing that the babbling talk of the Indians, who were already saddling up, did not rouse him, she went over to where he lay and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder.

" Oh, Don Estevan," she said in her softest voice; but it was as if she had unwittingly touched the trigger of a gun. She was startled at the suddenness with which he bounded to his feet, broad awake, rifle in hand, the ominous click-clack of the lever sounding loud as he instinctively threw in a cartridge from the magazine ; his flashing eyes darted one swift glance around, and then in an instant he recognised that there was no need for disquiet.

" Pshaw ! " he said in half-apology, " I guess I was dreaming. Sorry if I startled you, sefiorita. I suppose I 'm on my nerve a bit with all this trouble there 's been." He looked at the sun. " By George ! but it 's afternoon already, and I thought I 'd just lain down for a five-minutes' nap. That over there means the Navajos have come in with the lost horses, I suppose ? " He indicated the busy folk a little way off, where preparations for the start were going on.

" Yes," she answered, " they have but just arrived with them. That was why I ventured to call you."

" They must have had the dickens of a chase after them ; those Indian ponies are beggars to stray," he remarked, carefully working the lever so as to extract the cartridge from the chamber. " And there 's nothing happened, sefiorita, whilst I was asleep ? All 's quiet along the Potomac, eh ? "

" No," she answered, " nothing has happened. I

think the Indians have been rather suspicious that they might be attacked ; they 've most of them been out in the brush all morning on the watch."

" And you 've been on watch here by the camp-fire," he said, " and I 've been sleeping there like a log when I might have been talking to you "; he looked in her eyes with a smile as he rallied himself for his lack of gallantry. " And you 've made yourself smart for the home-coming, I see. That 's right, sefiorita. You 're not going to play the poor captive, not by no manner of means. We 've just been out for a cheerful picnic party, we have, like those high-toned tenderfoot outfits that come out from the East and go to camping out in South Park with an escort of Utes to do them honour. Well, well ; the pleasantest picnics have got to come to an end some time, and I see our escort under Mr. Mahletonkwa are really thinking of starting. I 'd better go and catch up Morgana, and then we 'll have you home in three hours. How 's that for high ? "

CHAPTER XXIV

WEIGHING THE SILVER

TWILIGHT was falling as the armed band of Mexicans who had waited since noon around Don Nepomuceno's house saw through the dusk a long cavalcade approaching from the sierra, and in the front of it a lady mounted on a horse, and a man running at her side. It was Manuelita returning, accompanied by Stephens and the Navajos. There were muttered threats and sonorous Spanish curses, deep if not loud, hurled against the raiders, and pistols were loosened in their holsters, and belts drawn tighter and adjusted, as the party drew near. There were men among the Mexicans who burned to avenge the insult of the abduction, and were ready and eager for the signal to fight. All they waited for was the word to begin.

But their ardour was momentarily checked by the older and more experienced among them. The cavalcade was suffered to approach peaceably, and Don Nepomuceno running forward received his daughter in his arms. No sooner was she seen to be safe out of the hands of the enemy, than the anger of the high-spirited young Mexicans broke forth in spite of their elders, and they raised the war-cry.

At this juncture the voice of the American was heard above the tumult. "Peace! peace!" he proclaimed

loudly for all to hear, "it is peace. I am responsible. A bargain has been made, and I am bound to see that Mahletonkwa and his people come to no harm at your hands. Anyone who touches them attacks me now. My honour is pledged, so take notice all."

"I do not see what right you have to bind us," cried a young Mexican, one of the two who had brought the news in the morning.

Stephens handed the mare's rein to Pedro, who came running from the house, whither Don Nepomuceno had already conducted his daughter; he held his Winchester at the ready, and ranged himself alongside of Mahletonkwa, who was in the saddle in front of his band.

"I have the right of discovery," he declared boldly. "It was I who found her with them, and made terms for her release. Those terms shall be satisfied to the last dollar in my pocket and the last cartridge in my belt. Come, my friends," and he changed his tone a little here, "let us show ourselves honourable men. Faith must be kept."

His appeal was hardly needed by the older and more experienced Mexicans, who had dealt with the wild Indians too often before this not to agree with him fully, and their influence quickly reduced the young hotheads to reason. Assurances were given that the terms he had made should be kept, and the Navajos be freed absolutely from molestation.

Don Nepomuceno hurried back from the house when he had restored Manuelita to the arms of her aunt, and embraced Stephens with effusion, calling him her saviour and deliverer.

"Come aside with me one moment, my friend," said the American, holding him by the hand, and check-

ing, as politely as might be, the flow of thanks poured upon him, "there is something I must speak with you about at once." They moved a little apart from the spectators. "I made a bargain with Mahletonkwa," said Stephens, "to guarantee him against any injury or retaliation for what has happened, and that has already been accepted by your good friends here. We were quite in the Indians' power, you know, and of course I was obliged to promise this. But I also promised Mahletonkwa a sum of money. In fact I must tell you that I promised him silver dollars enough to weigh down the rifle he carries; that will mean two hundred or two hundred and fifty, I expect. Now, I have not got them here, but I could easily get them by going to Santa Fé, only that would take so much time; and what I wanted to ask is, who is there among the San Remo people, do you think, that could advance me the amount? I should like to settle Mahletonkwa's business right away."

"But, my dear friend," cried Don Nepomuceno, "I will pay the money, of course. Thank goodness, it is only a quarter of what he asked at first."

"But it's my debt," interrupted the American. "I made the terms on my own hook entirely."

"Impossible, dear friend," cried the Mexican, "absolutely impossible and out of the question! You touch on my honour. I am most grateful to you for having succeeded in reducing his ridiculous demand by three-fourths, but not one *medio real* can I suffer you to pay. I should be disgraced for ever in the eyes of myself and of my people. Thank God, the Sanchez family can still pay their scot, if they are not so rich as they were. The silver shall be forthcoming immediately. Oh, there are ways and means,"—he nodded his head

mysteriously,—“you shall see. How much did you say will be needed?”

“About twelve or thirteen pounds’ weight of silver,” returned Stephens; “at least so I guessed when I hefted his rifle.”

“Very well,” said Sanchez, “if you will remain here and keep the peace—I see some of our young men are hardly to be restrained—then I will go in and bring out the scales and the money, and he shall have his price.”

He went into the house, and in a few minutes Pedro appeared with three long cottonwood poles and a rope. The poles were bound together at the top so as to form a tripod higher than a man’s head, and a piece of rope was left hanging down from the apex. Then he brought out a beam with a pair of large rude scales, and the middle of the beam being attached to the rope the balance was formed. By this time it was dark, and Pedro returned once more for some torches of pine, which were lit and threw their weird lights flickering over the faces of the bystanders. The lurid glare lit up the swarthy, bearded faces of the Mexicans who crowded round, and the dark, smooth cheeks and flashing eyes of the Indians, who, recognising that Stephens had power to protect them from attack, dismounted and closed up the ring.

Then from the darkness appeared Don Nepomuceno with a heavy leathern sack, and approached the scales.

“Now, then, Mahletonkwa,” said Stephens, “put your rifle in one of those scales, put it on whichever side you choose, and my agreement is to put silver enough in the other to pull it down.”

The Indian came forward, and stooping down placed his rifle on one side of the balance. Don Nepomuceno

stepped forward with the bag of silver towards the other.

"Wait one moment, señor, if you please," said Stephens to the latter. "There is one little matter I wish to settle first. I think, Mahletonkwa," he addressed the Indian, "we agreed that I should give your rifle's weight in silver, was it not so?"

The Indian assented.

"Is your rifle loaded?"

"It is."

"And was that in the bargain?"

"It was loaded when we made the bargain," answered the Navajo.

"And is it loaded now in the same way?"

The Indian remained silent.

"I'm willing you should have the full weight of it loaded," said Stephens, "I don't make any objection to that. Will you, then, fire off the load that's in it now, and put in another here before us all, that we may see how big a load you use?"

The Indian sullenly indicated dissent.

"We wish to have everything fair," said Stephens. "Why do you refuse?"

"It is very well as it is," muttered Mahletonkwa, looking singularly disconcerted.

"Then will you put the ramrod into the bore and let us see how big a load you have got in it?" persisted the American. "Or would you prefer that I should do it for you?"

He put out his hand as if to take the rifle for the purpose, but the Navajo sulkily caught it up himself. He spoke not a single word, and maintained an impassive face as he picked out a little tuft of rag that was wedged inside the muzzle of the gun, and, tilting

the barrel slightly forward, allowed sixty or seventy small round bullets to run out one after the other, plop, plop, plop, into the scale.

A roar of scornful laughter went up from the Mexicans at this demonstration of the American's 'cuteness and the Indian's baffled cunning.

Mahletonkwa deliberately swept the bullets back into his pouch, and replaced the rifle in the scale.

"Thank you," said Stephens, with quiet sarcasm ; "now I think we can begin. Don Nepomuceno, will you pour in the silver?"

The bag was untied, and from the mouth of it a stream of big white round coins rattled into the opposite scale. Bigger and bigger grew the heap ; the flickering torchlight played on dollars from Mexico and dollars that bore the image and superscription of many an old Spanish king who reigned before Mexico was a republic, on coins stamped in the United States Mint, and on five-franc pieces that displayed the head of Louis Napoleon—pieces that had come over with the French army that for a while had supported the rickety throne of ill-fated Maximilian. And now the stream ran slower and slower, and the rifle began to lift ; the Mexican stopped pouring, and taking a handful from the bag tossed them on to the pile one at a time. Gradually the rifle rose, the beam turned, the silver scale descended ; yet one more dollar was thrown in and it touched the earth. The tale was complete.

"There 's your silver, Mahletonkwa," said the American ; "your rifle kicks the beam. Are you satisfied now?"

"I am satisfied," said the Navajo ; "it is enough." He took a sack from one of his men and poured the glittering stream into it.

"*Basta!*" said Stephens. "Then it is settled. You acknowledge that my tongue is not double. I have done what I said I would do."

"And now," he went on, addressing the bystanders, "I have only one word more to say to you. Let by-gones be by-gones. The señorita has been brought back safe and unharmed, and the matter is over and done with. Let no man molest these people in any way for it, now or at any future time. If any man among you does so, he makes himself my enemy, for I am surety to the Indians in this. If he touches them, he must walk over my dead body. And to you, Navajos, I have one more word to say,"—he had caught sight while he was speaking of the sinister face of Backus among the crowd,—"be advised and go straight back to your own country. Don't hang about here; and above all don't touch whiskey. Take my advice and let the sun of to-morrow find you ten leagues from San Remo—and sober. I have spoken."

He turned away, and in company with Don Nepomuceno and his son retired to the house, while the Indians remounted their horses and filed off in the moonlight, and the assembly gradually dispersed.

Inside the house Stephens found Manuelita in the sitting-room, with various female friends and relations who had gathered to see the heroine of such an adventure and to hear her story. Her shining eyes and flushed cheeks made her look more bewitching than ever, but he saw how overstrained were her nerves, and he longed to turn out the cackling crowd and carry her off far away to some peaceful retreat where no fear or grief should ever dare to come near her again. But no sooner had he shown himself in the room than a stout old lady who had been Manuelita's

nurse in childhood arose and fell upon his neck and kissed him heartily.

" Blessings on you ! " she cried, with tearful loquacity, " and may the *Madre de Dios* and all the blessed saints be with you and reward you for your goodness." She clasped him to her heart. " You are a hero," she said, " a perfect hero ! you have brought us back my dear child safe and unharmed from the clutches of those anathematised Indians, whom may the devil fly away with ! "

Poor Stephens felt weak ; he was helplessly taken aback.

And then a second old lady, the mother of Pedro the peon it was this time, who had been devoted to Manuelita for years, felt it incumbent on her also to demonstrate her gratitude to the deliverer of her darling, and she too bore down on him, and precipitated herself upon his shoulder to mingle her tears, her kisses, and her blessings with the other's.

Stephens's feelings were indescribable.

" ' It never rains but it pours,' " he thought. " It 's ten years since I 've been kissed by a woman, and now I 'm hugged by two at once." He endeavoured to extricate himself with becoming gratitude from these entangling embraces, that he might advance to receive the thanks of Don Nepomuceno's sister and her relations. Their expressions of gratitude and admiration were not less ardent than those which had already been showered upon him, but to his immense relief they took a more decorous form. He acknowledged their compliments and their thanks as gracefully as he could, longing all the time to escape from this ordeal and get away as quickly as possible in order to take in hand the matter of the burial of the dead prospector.

As soon as he could decently do so, he took the first opportunity again to call Don Nepomuceno apart. "I want to get you to lend me a spade," he said; "it will save me the journey of going back to the pueblo for one. I have a little trip to make up into the sierra to-night"; and he explained to the Mexican how he had discovered almost by chance where the bones of the nameless victim of the Navajos were lying.

Don Nepomuceno urged him to put it off. "*Mañana, por la mañana; porque ahora es tarde*"—"Leave it till to-morrow; it is too late now," he said. "Rest to-night; there is no hurry."

"There's a good moon," said Stephens, "and I don't want to delay about it. It's all in a day's work anyhow. But can you lend me the spade, for if not I must go home after one?"

"But certainly, my dear friend, assuredly I can. Everything I have is at your service. Let me lend you a horse too, for your mare has done her work; leave her here with me to eat corn, and to-morrow she will be fresh."

Stephens very willingly availed himself of this offer, and half an hour later the sharp eyes of Felipe, watching hungrily for his enemy, saw the figure he knew so well riding away quietly from Don Nepomuceno's house in the direction of the sierra, and he detected by the light of the moon that he carried an unusual burden in the shape of a spade across the saddle in front of him. Here in the open the boy did not see his chance to make a sudden attack and take him by surprise at close quarters as he had planned, and being puzzled by the sight of the spade, and full of wonder as to what his errand could be, he ran full speed to the storekeeper's house to inform him of it.

As he arrived there, he saw another mysterious horseman ride away from the corral at the back of the house into the night, and had he been able to get close enough to him he might have seen that he, too, bore a burden, for the rider was no other than the Navajo chief himself, and the burden that he bore consisted of several bottles of Mr. Backus's fiery whiskey, while a round number of what had lately been a part of Don Nepomuceno's precious hoard of dollars were now lining the interior of the storekeeper's wallet.

Stephens's counsel had been disregarded. The Spaniards have a riddling proverb which asks, "What is the cheapest thing on earth?" and the answer is, "Good advice." In the eyes of the Navajo the advice to let whiskey alone was very cheap indeed. The morrow's sun would find him neither ten leagues from San Remo nor sober.

Felipe encountered Backus at his own door, and hastily recounted to him how he had just seen the prospector ride off in the direction of the sierra with a spade across his saddle.

"Be after him then, man," cried the storekeeper; "there's your chance, if you have n't lost it. He's gone after something with that spade, you bet. Keep him in sight, and don't ever let your eye be off him till he begins to use it, and when he's busy at work with it, there's your opportunity. Or if you like to risk a fuss, show yourself boldly, and go up to him and mebbe he won't suspect what you mean to do. But don't miss your chance."

Felipe was gone like a shot.

No sooner had the boy disappeared than Backus began to regret it. He had been rather flustered, before Felipe came up to him, by his interview with the

Navajo chief, for Mahletonkwa had begun by taxing Backus with not having kept Stephens from sending for the soldiers, by making away with his letters to the governor and the general, and he had retorted by declaring that he had done so, that no soldiers were coming, and that if Mahletonkwa had allowed himself to be bluffed he had only himself to thank for his idiocy. But they did not waste much time in disputing, for Mahletonkwa's visit to him had not been to quarrel but to obtain liquor, while Backus's strongest desire was to become the possessor of a goodly lot of those shining dollars of Don Nepomuceno that had attracted his cupidity.

Now, however, on thinking over what Felipe had reported, a possible explanation of the spade flashed upon him. Suppose Stephens had got the secret of the mine from the Navajos ! He had remarked the vigour and determination with which the prospector had placed himself apparently on the side of the Navajos as against the Mexicans when they arrived. Probably this was a return for their having shown him the mine, which, moreover, would account for the unaccountable delay of the party in arriving that afternoon.

The idea of the prospector having stolen a march on him like this, in the matter of the mine, irritated him intensely ; he knew so little practically of mining that he thought it quite possible that Stephens had started off thus in the night with a spade to dig up silver out of an old mine, as a man might dig up the coins of a buried hoard. Filled with this idea, he took a sudden resolution to follow Felipe and see what took place, and, if there was any secret worth getting hold of, to do his best to make himself master of it.

He hastily belted on his revolver, caught up an over-

coat, as he recognised that he might have to lie in wait for an indefinite time, and the night air in the sierra was chill, and started forth on Felipe's track. He knew the direction ; and assuming that Stephens had taken the trail for the sierra, according to the information Felipe had brought, he decided to take the same line.

There were plough-lands across on this side of the Santiago River also, and the trail led through a part of these. Where it crossed the ditch that supplied them with water he found the ground wet on the farther bank, and fresh hoof-prints of a horse in the soft earth. Someone had crossed there on horseback not more than fifteen or twenty minutes before; yes, and there, close alongside, was the sharp-toed, inward-curved print of an Indian moccasin. Stephens and Felipe were both ahead of him.

It was only in a place like this, where the soft earth retained a deep impression, that he could pretend to recognise their tracks by the light of the moon, but the fact that he had judged so accurately the course they were steering gave him confidence as he pressed forward, still following the line. And now the foot of the sierra was reached, and the trail plunged abruptly into broken and rugged defiles. Onward he pushed without halting, encouraged again and again by detecting at intervals the tracks of the horse going ahead. At last, however, there came a long interval, when he no longer saw the tracks. For a while he tried to persuade himself that it was only a chance that had caused him to fail to notice them, but he came finally to where the trail crossed a little creek, and the ground was soft and the trees were open enough to let the moonlight fall clearly on the spot. The sign of the Indian horses

that had crossed it coming to San Remo during the afternoon was evident, but the footprints of the horse he was following in the other direction were not there. It was undeniable that he must have quitted the trail.

"Now, whereabouts did the son of a gun leave it?" asked Backus of himself; "and how far back was it that I got a squint of his track last?" He pulled out a cold lunch, that he had brought along in his pocket, put on his overcoat, and sat down to take a rest and think things over. If Stephens had simply turned off and camped near the trail, he might have missed him by very little. Perhaps Felipe had been able to keep him in sight, and had stuck to him.

He started to take the back track, keeping a sharp watch out for likely places for a rider to turn out on one side or other of the trail. There were plenty of them, but he found no sign in any of those that he examined. And he had the exasperating sense, that trying to hit off a lost trail by moonlight was as futile a job as a man ever undertook. By daylight a master of woodcraft may assure himself that he has not walked over a hoofprint for which he is searching without seeing it, but the best trailer that ever stepped can miss a thing by moonlight that by day would be as plain to him as a printed book.

"A fool's errand," he said to himself, "that's what I'm on. Here I might be comfortably at home and snug in bed, and instead of that I'm lost up here in the sierra away along after midnight, and nary chance of finding what I come out after." He was thoroughly out of temper by this time, and his language was according. "Mine! d—n the mine! I believe the whole thing is a holy fraud, and if anyone ever again catches me out in the dark, on top of a rugged range

of hills hunting for a mine that never existed, I 'll give him leave to cut me into slices and fry me like so much bacon." He sat down to rest a moment before deciding finally whether to make any further effort, or just chuck and make the best of his way home.

At this moment, faint but distinct, came the sound of a shot fired somewhere in the mountain off to the south. Backus sprang to his feet instantly, shaking himself free from his despondency like a cloak.

"By the jumping Jemini!" he ejaculated, "there they are, I 'll wager. Felipe must have managed to stick to the trail. Good for him! I wonder if he 's managed to plug him? I 'll just take a scout round that way and see if I can spot anything."

The moon was beginning to sink in the west, but there was light enough for him to pick his way through the trees and rocks in the direction of the shot. Suddenly he heard five shots in quick succession. They were nearer and clearer than before. But they were followed by absolute silence. Again and again he paused to listen, but no sounds greeted his ear save those that belonged to the woods at night, till at last, after scrambling up a rocky ridge, he became aware of a reflected light shining at the foot of a cliff. That meant a camp-fire. Hist! was that somebody talking? If Felipe had killed his man properly, there was no one for him to talk to. He advanced a step or two cautiously, and paused again. He fancied he could hear a voice; he would put his ear to the ground and see if he could not hear better so; he stooped, and sank on all fours as if he was after a deer, bending his head towards the earth, and as he did so he received a hard blow on his face, and a smart pang shot through his

cheek, and at the same moment his ears were assailed by an angry, buzzing rattle.

"My God!" he cried, "I'm stung by a snake!" He threw up his hand to his wounded cheek and staggered to his feet, while the snake, having delivered his blow, slithered away to his home in the rocks. The agony of the poison began to dart through his veins. He struggled blindly forward towards the light, which now seemed ever so far away; he stopped and drew out his knife, with the idea of cutting out the venom, but it was right in his cheek; had it been in a finger he might have chopped it off, but he could not slash away half his own face. He flung the knife wildly from him and reeled forward again, knocking against the trees as he went like a blinded wolf. He had been struck by a big rattler with a full dose of venom in him after his winter's rest. His knees grew weak, and tottered under him; he fell, and struggled up again, only to fall once more; fearful pains ran through him, and his body seemed too big for his skin.

"Help," he cried, in a spent and broken voice; "help me! oh, help!" and he pitched forward and lay prone on his face, writhing and digging his nails into the ground.

CHAPTER XXV

A PREHISTORIC HEARTH

WHEN Stephens took his way through the moonlight, carrying the spade before him on the saddle, his heart was lighter than it had been for days. He was so used to living alone that this novel experience of being constantly in the company of others, night and day, without interruption, ever since the hour when he had rescued Josefa from the cacique, had tired him out. Also he disliked the sense of having others dependent on him, and during the whole of that time he had been burdened with responsibility, first for Josefa and then for the Mexican girl. At last, thank goodness, that was all over and done with. Josefa was secure in Reyna's keeping, and Manuelita was safe at home, while Mahletonkwa had been paid his money and dismissed ; now John Stephens was his own man again, and not bound to see after other people's affairs any longer. He could go about his proper business by himself in his own independent way, and that was precisely what he liked better than anything else in the world. As for this matter of finding and burying the dead man's bones, it was one for which he was answerable to nobody but himself. Of his own free will and pleasure he had decided that it should be done, and, accordingly, here he was doing it. And

what a useful pretext it had supplied him with for getting away from the fuss and flummery at San Remo. When he thought of those two stout, elderly dames falling upon him like a pair of animated feather-beds, and giving him their blessing, he felt weak ; what a mercy he had this excuse of the burial to help him escape from it all ! And then his mind reverted to Manuelita sitting there in the midst of the fuss, her eyes bright as ever in spite of fatigue and of the tears of joy she had shed at getting home, her cheeks pink with excitement, and her lively tongue going sixteen to the dozen. Was he, after all, so particularly glad to be off by himself once more ? He hated a mob of people on principle, but was he so particularly glad to get away from her ? Well, come to think of it, in a manner he was, and yet, again, he was n't. Looking at it in one way, he would n't care much to be planted down there again in that crowded room with those cousins and aunts all round her, but suppose, now, that he had her once again with him up here in the sierra, alone together the two of them. He thought of how they had watched over one another, turn about, in the camp, and how she had mocked at his simple cookery, and the fun they had really had with one another. What a good time it had been ; and yet when he was having it, so it seemed to him now, he had not been aware of the fact. Perhaps he had been too anxious about her then to realise it, but it was God's truth all the same, and they had had a good time. What was more, he knew it now and no mistake, and he wondered how it had come about that it was so good. By George ! but he did wish he had her along right here and now, she riding on the horse, with him running alongside just as he had done that afternoon. She was good to

talk to, and no mistake, and when he pointed things out to her and told her about them, everything seemed to have an unwonted zest which was lacking now in her absence, although he was riding over the very same ground he had traversed with her only a few hours ago. Every turn in the trail recalled to his mind something he had said to her or she had said to him. And how they had laughed, to be sure ! He sighed at the recollection without having the least idea that he sighed, but he did not shake off the idea of how good it would be to have her with him. Strange to say he began to discover that he did not seem to quite care for his own company as he used to do. Unconsciously he lost himself in a reverie, until his horse stumbled over a stone, and he jerked the rein and struck him indignantly with the spur.

And all the time Felipe, with the revolver in his belt, was tracking him like a sleuth-hound.

Stephens reached the camp where they had passed the night in the little park, and the recollection of it all came back vividly; he remembered how startled he had been when she woke him, and he had sprung up with his rifle cocked, ready to shoot ; he remembered his surprise and pleasure at seeing how neat and trim she had made herself while he slept, in spite of all the rough and discomposing experiences her involuntary journey had involved. "Grit ! Yes, by George ! she had lots of it, sure ; and endurance too. She was just about as brave as they make 'em."

Through the little park he passed, and out of it again on the other side. Now he must begin to think about his destination; somewhere along here he meant to turn off to the left in order to cut in upon the head of that little cañon where he had killed the deer.

That would save quite a lot of travelling. There was a good moon, and there was no need to retrace the whole trail back to the exact spot where he had fired the shot. "If I only had Faro along now," he said, "he could take me to the place where I killed the deer, blindfold, if I wanted him to." But Faro was far away at Don Nepomuceno's; he was a little footsore after the long journey he had made, so his master left him behind under the care of Manuelita. After a time Stephens noticed a favourable place for turning off among the pines, at what he judged would be about the right distance to strike the cañon. He wheeled his horse sharp to the left, and pushed steadily on over the carpet of pine-needles in the new direction.

And Felipe, following ever like a sleuth-hound, here overran the track just as did Backus half an hour later. But, unlike Backus, the acuter Indian boy had not overrun it many minutes before his quick instincts told him what he had done; he at once retraced his steps, and quickly succeeded in finding the place where Stephens had wheeled so sharp. He followed this new direction through the pines for a little way, but the horse-tracks on the dry pine-needles were practically invisible at night, and he soon became conscious that he had lost them, and that it was doubtful whether he could succeed in recovering them again. Nevertheless, with the tireless determination of his race, he persevered, more like a hound than ever as he quested now to right and now to left and now making a bold cast forward, in the hope that by a lucky chance he might stumble upon them. He passed thus through the belt of pine timber and out into the open park country beyond it. But casting about for a lost trail at night is a slow business, and the moon was already

low in the west when his eye ranging around caught the light of a fire against a distant cliff. "That must be he," cried the boy, grasping the pistol with his left hand ; " I 'll get him now."

Stephens had a good eye for country; he had judged his distance correctly, and he hit the head of the little cañon he was searching for with singular accuracy. The country that he had here got into was beautifully open and park-like, only with some rough, rocky ridges intersecting it here and there, and he searched around freely and easily, keeping the moon on his left hand. Through the mountain glades he wandered, in the bright, mysterious light which seems so clear and yet which shows nothing as it really is.

"Rather a fool trick of mine, this night-work," said he, as his eyes hunted in vain for any sign of what he had come to seek. "I reckon likely I'll have to camp till morning, and then, maybe, if his bones are lying anywhere round here, I'll manage to find them." He drew rein irresolutely on the margin of a park-like expanse of undulating meadow larger than any he had seen yet.

"Hullo! what 's that under the Lone Pine in the middle of the meadow?" A magnificent solitary pine-tree stood there in the moonlight, towering aloft, and at its foot a dark, square object appeared.

"Why, it looks like a house in this light," he said ; "but it can't hardly be one neither." He turned his horse's head towards it and rode nearer. "It 's a house, by George! A house up here! No, I'm blessed if it is. It is only a rock, but it 's mighty like one all the same. Hullo! here 's a queer thing lying close to the foot of it ; looks like an old carcass of some sort or

other. By George ! but it 's a dead horse." He reined up and the animal he bestrode snorted at the strange object. It was the dried shell of a horse, so to speak ; the wolves and the eagle-hawks had taken the flesh and the inside portions, but the skeleton had remained intact, and so, too, had the hide. In that pure, dry air the skin, instead of decaying, had become hard and stiff, and clung to the ribs and bony framework still. He could see now that his mistake in taking the rock for a house was a very pardonable one in that deceptive light, for it was much the size of an ordinary adobe cottage, and it rose square and abrupt from the level, grassy ground. He threw his head back, and his eyes sought the top of the noble pine whose towering head seemed to strike against the stars.

" Well, that 's the finest tree I ever saw outside of California," said the prospector.

He undid the lariat and dismounted, spade in hand.

" Dead horses aint exactly common objects hereabouts," said he. " If this one owned such a thing as a boss when he was alive, perhaps his boss might be lying hereabouts, too."

It was a shrewd guess, and as he stepped round the corner of the rock it was instantly verified. The body of the man lay there, stiff and dried like that of his beast. The clothing seemed to have partly protected the trunk and limbs from the birds of prey, but the white skull shone bare and ghastly. The long boots proclaimed him an American.

" Here 's my man, sure enough," said Stephens, as he leaned on the spade and looked down at the remains. " Think of him getting rubbed out like this all alone up here in the mountains. No one 's ever been near him since, I guess. I wonder who he was ?"

He went back to the dead horse and looked over it once more. There were iron shoes on the forehoofs. "That 's another proof, if one were wanted, of his owner being an American," he said. "Perhaps I could find his brand." He struck a match and held it close to the animal's quarter, but the skin there had been rent and frayed by the wild things that had devoured the meat, and he could not distinguish it.

"Saddle 's gone, I see," he added, "and bridle and saddle blanket, and hobbles, if he had them round his neck, and every mortal thing. It 's a wonder they left the horseshoes. These accursed Navajos have n't any scruple about stripping a dead horse. It 's only a dead man that they 're so scared about touching."

He went back to the corpse and looked at it a second time. "Gun 's gone," he said, "but that 's of course. And they did n't need to touch him when he was dead to get it, for, according to the way Mahletonkwa told it, they got his gun from him when he was alive. Pistol 's gone, too, I see. Likely they got that off him living, before they shot him with his own gun. They could n't take the clothes off him till he was dead, and so they preferred to leave them on him. Wish I knew who he was." He cast his eyes around. "Here 's where he stood 'em off," he went on, looking at a tiny, stone-built enclosure, barely big enough to hold three people at once, that nestled against one side of the high rock, where it overhung. "That 's the place he chose, sure. That 's one of those cubby-holes those old cliff-dwellers used to put up under the rocks all about the country; I guess they used them to shelter in when they were out on guard. It was n't a bad notion of this poor chap to get in there, but those infernal Navajos got away with him all the same—cunning devils

that they are ! Well, I might as well dig his grave right here."

He passed his horse's lariat round the enormous bole of the great Lone Pine and made him fast. Then choosing a place between the mighty roots, that anchored it like cables to the ground, he set to work with a will, and soon had the narrow last resting-place sunk in the soft black earth. He threw down the spade, and went to lift the light burden of the remains. "Perhaps I'd better look in his pockets first and see if there's anything to identify him by," he said. The weather-worn clothes, threadbare from summer rains and winter snows, lay light over the hollow breast, as he felt in the pocket and drew out a small book. He opened it ; it was weather-stained, but not rotten. The moonlight was so bright he could almost have read the writing by it, but he struck a match to make sure. A name was inscribed on the first page. "Holly K. Fearmaker, 1869." There was no address. "Never heard of him before. I wonder where he was from ?" He tried the other pockets ; there was nothing save some bits of string. "If he owned a purse I reckon some Navajo scoundrel has got it now," said Stephens. "There's nothing, I don't believe, that Mahletonkwa would stick at for cash."

He lifted the remains tenderly, and placed them in the grave, gathering up all that he could find ; then he shovelled the rich black mould of the mountain meadow on them, and heaped a little mound, and replaced the grassy sods on top. He leaned on the spade and looked down at his handiwork.

"What was it I seem to remember it saying, in the book that young Englishman had along in the San Juan district last summer, and loaned me to copy a

piece out of? There was a verse that I liked, about the body of a man being like a tent. Yes, I've got it now—

“ ‘T is but a tent where takes his one day's rest
A Sultan to the realm of Death address ;
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrásh
Strikes—and prepares it for another guest.’ ”

This grass will send its roots down to where you lie, pard ; and it 'll grow stronger as your bones grow rotten ; and then the blacktail deer and the elk will graze over your head and fatten on the grass ; and then, maybe I myself, or maybe some other lone prospector just like you or me, will happen along and shoot the elk or the deer, and the wheel comes full circle. Well, so long, old man, and sleep sound.”

He went to the tree and unfastened the lariat from the bole. Then he stooped to pick up the spade which lay beside the new-made mound. As he did so his eye was caught by a little fragment of rock that lay by it, which had been thrown out in sinking the grave. Mechanically he picked it up, and its weight at once revealed to his practised experience that it was a mineral of some kind. He slipped it into his pocket and led his horse over to the big rock. “ It does look rather like an outcrop,” he said, as he carelessly knocked off a few small specimens with the angle of the spade. He had done this so many hundred times before, that he pocketed them almost without interest, as a matter of habit, and set off in the direction of the trail. Before very long he came to a stop.

The meadow was bounded by a low cliff, which, farther down, became the wall of the cañon where he had killed the deer. It was not more than about twenty or thirty feet high, but it was perpendicular,

in places even overhanging, and blocked his way absolutely. He turned to the right along it in order to find where he might cross it. The cliff faced south and west, and the bright light of the moon made every detail distinct. Before he had gone far the opening of another little cubby-hole showed dark on a ledge of the moonlit cliff, which was overhung by the projecting brow above. Then there came half a dozen of them close together. Then the ledge broadened and ran inwards in a softer stratum of the cliff face, so that a whole row of little houses were built along it. The ledge was ten or twelve feet up the cliff face, so that the houses could only have been approached by ladders, while the overhanging cliff brow afforded them absolute protection from above.

"By George!" he said, "this must be the old pueblo I've heard of as being up here in the mountain; they say the Aztecs used to live here before the days of Montezuma."

The ledge ceased presently, and here there were rooms absolutely carved out of the living rock itself. Nor were these aloft in air like the former ones; it seemed as if the people who had evolved the idea of building their houses like swallows' nests under the eaves, for security, had gained confidence and come boldly down to the level of the ground. He looked into one, and struck a match; it was just a little square room with a doorway, all cut out of solid rock. The floor was bare rock too. "Lots of cheap labour going when they made houses like that," he said. "There must have been a whole heap of folks living here once."

Farther on there were the remains of stone houses built on the ground, close to, or against, the cliff face. "Thick as bees they must have been," he said; "I'd

no sort of idea there had been such a vast number of them. It must have been a regular swarmery of Indians."

He went on half a mile or more, and the buildings were continuous either on the ground or upon the ledge, which ran right along. They were almost all square or oblong in plan, but here and there at intervals appeared one that was round and of a sort of beehive form. These were old estufas. "I've a good mind to camp here," he said, "and see what this place looks like by daylight. I never had the least notion there was so much of it. Some of those scientific chaps at the Smithsonian ought to be told about this. I bet it's the oldest thing in the United States."

He stopped before one of the ancient cave-dwellings. It was not one of those excavated entirely out of the rock, for here there was a natural cave on the ground level. Across the front of this a wall had been built, enclosing the space behind it as a dwelling-room, but the wall had been partly broken down by time. In the angle where the wall joined the rock there was a fireplace. Close by, an external house had been built as a sort of lean-to against the rock face, with a roof supported by beams that had now fallen in.

"I guess I'll just move in and take possession," he said as he looked at the cave-dwelling, and, suiting the action to the word, he stripped the saddle from his horse and put it inside, and then led him out in the meadow to picket him.

He returned to where he had left his saddle; he could see by the moonlight the fallen roof-beams of the outside house lying confusedly here and there. The roof had been of clay, but this had all washed down and now was indistinguishable from the floor, while

the layers of brushwood that had supported it had crumbled into dust. But the primeval rafters of enduring pitch-pine were still mostly sound.

Entering the cave-dwelling, where he had put his saddle, his eye was caught by the old fireplace ; it was still blackened with the flame of the fire that had so long ago been quenched, and still there lay visible on the hearth, cold and black, the dead embers that had once been live and glowing coals of fire.

" I wonder how many centuries it is since those were live coals ? " he said. " I 've heard say the old, old Aztecs used to live up north here in these deserted mountain pueblos and cliff-dwellings before ever they went south and built the City of Mexico. And they 'd been living down there, so I 've heard, for ages and ages before Cortes came along and slaughtered Montezuma. Why, it might be a thousand years since this place was inhabited. "

He looked at the dead embers with a fascinated gaze. To him, who considered a mining camp of two years' duration quite old, who was himself one of the restless spirits who were busy making history, the history of the New West, the prehistoric hearth came with a strange appeal.

" I 'll rekindle it, " he said ; " I will so ; I 'd like to warm my hands at a fire that 's a thousand years old maybe. Those old rafters out there will do well to burn. " He stepped round to the ruined house. " I wonder if there 's any snakes hiding among those fallen stones ? " He struck a match once more, and looked round in likely corners and crevices, but no sign of any reptile appeared ; he dragged out a couple of rafters and carried them in and placed their ends in the fireplace ; he broke with a heavy stone another one

that had partly rotted, and got some splinters out of the sounder part and soon had a fire going. He watched the dead embers catch and glow red from the blaze.

"Who'd have thought in all those hundreds of years," he said, "as they lay dead, that they'd ever jump to life again in one moment like this." His words pointed to the glowing coals, but he was thinking of the poor shell of a body that an hour before he had committed to the ground. Who could believe that it might ever live again? and yet—some folks said so.

The fate of that lonely man had moved him deeply, more deeply by far than he was conscious of, for it was the type of what his own was like to be, to fall unfriended and alone in some remote ravine of a nameless range. He thought of the pocket-book he had rescued, and drew it out. The fire blazed brightly now, and he could read by it easily. The notes were casual jottings—entries of cash expended—notes of an arrangement with another man to meet and mine together—the brand of a horse purchased, and the price set down, eighty-five dollars—Winchester cartridges, two and a half dollars.

"That's clear enough evidence that he had a Winchester," commented Stephens; "all right, then; practically that settles it. He's the man, sure, those cursed Navajos joked about killing with his own gun. Hullo! what's this? Mahletonkwa's name, as I'm alive!" He rapidly ran his eye over a page of close writing. "Why, he's got it all down that Mahletonkwa brought him up here to show him a silver mine, and then treacherously left him, and that then he was attacked by Indians; he does n't say what Indians, poor beggar; but you bet I know who they were.

Here's his last entry. 'I've stood them off now for six hours, and if they don't get me before night, maybe I'll make the raffle and get away.' It was after he'd written that that they wounded him and he surrendered to them, and they had their little game with him, the sons of guns! But that's their way; cruelty and cunning are bred in their bones. They've been doing things like that for a good deal more than a thousand years, I guess, and they've kind of got into the habit of it. But I'd like to pay them out all the same. It's that Mahletonkwa's band are the guilty ones, and I dare swear to it. Well, we'll see. I've given them no amnesty for this. We'll see."

He sat there, quite still, in a fierce and moody silence. He was so still that a rattlesnake in the stones behind him pushed his flat, venomous head out of a crevice, and looked at him for quite a long time, and then drew it in again and retired. "Leave me alone and I'll leave you alone," was the snake's motto. He had no wrongs to avenge.

Unconscious of this silent observer of his reverie, the American allowed himself to indulge for a while in wild, fanciful dreams of revenge for the murder of his fellow-countryman; then he pulled himself up short.

"I'm not really called upon to punish them," he said, "and I won't think about it. It only makes me angry, and I hate to be angry and do nothing." He raised himself up, moved the ends of the burning rafters farther into the fireplace, and the flames blazed up freshly.

"Kit Carson used to be mighty careful about looking into the camp-fire at night," he said. "He always used to sit well away from the blaze, with his eyes towards the darkness, so that if anything happened he

could see with them at once, without having to wait till they had got accustomed to it. But then there was always war going on, and always danger, when he used to be around in this part of the country. I've never felt shy about sitting by a camp-fire up in this sierra, and there aint no reason that I know of why I should."

He rose and straightened himself up to his full height, and stretched out his arms as a relief after sitting so still. "I might as well take a look round, though," he said, "and see if that horse is all right. I don't know his tricks, and he might tangle himself up in his picket-rope." He strolled out to where he had fastened him, and made sure that he was all right. As he turned to come back again, he saw something on the ground that caught the fire-light and shone like a jewel. He stooped to pick it up. It was an obsidian arrowhead.

"Volcanic glass," said the miner,—expert as he was in minerals,—critically turning it over and over in his fingers, "and most beautifully chipped. This is a piece of real high-class ancient Indian work. Now, I wonder if that arrow belonged to one of those old Aztec pueblo folks, or if it was one shot at them by some wild Indian. The wild Indians were enemies of the house-people then, same as now."

His imagination took fire as he looked at this relic of ancient strife. The long procession of the centuries unrolled itself before his mind's eye, and he beheld the secular struggle for life of tribe against tribe. Those old pueblo builders, cultivators of corn, house-folk, had always been at odds with their nomad brethren, the hunters of the wild wood and the plains; yet generation after generation, they had gone on being born, growing up, marrying, and begetting a new generation to succeed them, and passing away either in battle

for their little community or peacefully by their own hearth. This fire-blackened, clay-plastered angle of the wall, to what unending succession of house-mothers and house-fathers did it not speak? He looked at it with a sort of reverence. The flickering light of the flames, rekindled by him, alien successor as he was of those ancient folk, lit up every detail of the surface. In places the clay daubed on there so many centuries ago looked as fresh as if it had been done last year. Here and there he could see the very finger-marks of the woman who had plastered it; for among the Indians this was ever the task of the women, as he knew very well. Yes, and, by George! there in one spot, low down, was the handprint of a tiny child in the plaster; the little one had been playing beside its mother, and had stuck its hand against the wall while the clay was wet. A strange emotion struck through him at the sight. It was as if the little hand had reached out to him across the years and touched his own. The fire he had kindled on this cold hearth seemed like a sort of altar flame, in memory of the love that had once made this little abode a sacred place.

Like a flash it came across his mind that this was what he had blindly sacrificed during all these long years of his wanderings—the joys of home; the sweet domesticities of wife and child. He knew them not; aloof, solitary, self-contained, he had coldly held himself outside the circle of all that was best in life. Why? To what end? For the sake of phantom gold; for the sake of a visionary fortune which he might never touch; for the sake of being able to build, some distant, day a fancied home away back there in the States. It was all a dream. Ten of the best years

of his life had gone in the vain effort. Ten more might go as easily and as futilely. And then ! OLD AGE ! He saw it all now ; and now it was no imaginary shadow-wife—dim, vague, and unsubstantial—that his heart went out to ; it was she, the real, living, breathing creature of flesh and blood that he had played with and talked to ; that he had rescued in her trouble, and restored to her parents ; she whose sweet eyes met his with a certain demand. With a rush it came over him that she was what he needed ; that he wanted to make her happy, and that he must do it by making her his own. He was amazed at his own blindness and hardness of heart. Was he too late ? Could he have missed his chance ? No, no ; not that ! But he would lose no time. He knew now what he must say to her, and the quicker he did it the better. With a joyful sense of anticipation he saw himself already at her side, pouring into her ear the tale of his loneliness and his love. He sprang to his feet at the thought, eager to start. As he rose to his full height there was a deafening bang close to his right ear, a blinding flash, and the burning breath of gunpowder scorched his cheek. Some murderer had fired at him from a yard off !

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SNAKE'S VERDICT

IN that desperate moment Stephens felt that he was respited as by a miracle. The bullet had missed him. He dropped his right hand on to the wall over which the weapon had been fired, and clearing it with a mighty bound, lit right on top of someone recocking a discharged pistol. His eyes, dazzled by the fire glare, saw nothing, but he grappled him by the feel on the instant ; with one powerful twist of his body he whirled his opponent off his legs and flung him to the ground, going down with him himself and falling heavily upon him. The Indian—he knew him for an Indian as he grappled with him by the blanket he wore—felt like a child in his grip. He seized him by the throat with the left hand and choked him, his right holding the left arm of the other and pinning him to the ground. What he had to fear now was that the free right arm would deal him some deadly blow with knife or pistol, and he tightened his grasp on the muscular throat to choke the life out of him. Then he suddenly realised that his foe was mastered, and he lifted his weight partly off his chest, still, however, kneeling on him with one knee and bearing him down with his hands.

And now his eyes were growing accustomed to the dark, and he could distinguish the features of the man

under him. "By George!" he cried, "but it's Felipe. Why, you murderous young cub, what devilment are you up to now?"

But the Indian youth lay helpless under his knee, gasping, and made no answer. That strangling grasp on his throat had nearly finished him off.

Still holding him down, Stephens ran his eyes around to see if other foes were near. The moon was very low now, but its level rays cast sufficient light to allow him to discern that there was no enemy visible anywhere. He listened intently, but no sound came to him except the laboured breathing of the prostrate Indian. He longed for Faro. "If I'd only got you along, old man," thought he, "this young devil would never have been able to get the drop on me the way he did; and now you'd be able to tell me whether there were any more mean hounds like him laying for me. I wonder if there are any more around?" For several minutes he remained motionless like this, but there was no sign of anyone to succour the fallen man. The discharged pistol was lying on the ground within arm's length. He reached out and picked it up, his left hand and knee still firmly pressing his antagonist against the ground. He looked the revolver over; it was a good weapon, he could tell that much, but he could not recognise it. He had mended many weapons for the Santiago people during the winter, and the thought had occurred to him that he might chance to know this one, but on examination he did not remember to have ever set eyes on it before.

Felipe, under his knee, lay perfectly still, and his breathing was becoming more regular. Laying the pistol down behind him, Stephens felt for the boy's belt, and unbuckled it and dragged it from under him;

it carried a knife in its sheath as well as the holster for the pistol. He put these behind him likewise, away from his prisoner's hand. Again he paused and listened for the sound of possible enemies approaching ; but he could hear nothing whatever. He felt his own revolver, to make sure it was all right in its place, and he thought of his Winchester lying in its case by his saddle, the other side of the wall. If an enemy were to sneak up and grab that, he, Stephens, would be in a fix. He took his weight off his knee for a moment, so as to lighten the pressure on Felipe's body. " Who 's with you, you young ruffian ? " he asked.

" No one, Sooshiuamo," replied the boy. The breath was fast coming back to his lungs ; he spoke audibly, but with difficulty.

" Don't call me Sooshiuamo, you wretch ! Do you mean to say you 're here all alone ? If you lie to me now I 'll kill you right here."

" Yes, sir," said Felipe, " I 'm alone."

Stephens hesitated ; he knew Felipe well enough to judge, by the way he spoke, that he was telling the truth ; but he was much puzzled to account for this murderous attack. Various theories flitted through his brain. He had not a single enemy in the pueblo that he knew of, the cacique perhaps excepted ; but the cacique, of all men, was the most unlikely to select Felipe to do this trick. Could this attack be intended as a punishment on him for violating some old superstition of theirs, by making a fire here in the ruined pueblo ? Such a thing might be ample justification for murdering him, from their point of view, as he had reason to know. Their behaviour over the blasting of the ditch was proof enough of how strongly they could feel about things that shocked their religious

susceptibilities. But how could they have known of his crime when he had only found the spot an hour ago? He determined to cross-question his prisoner.

"Who set you on to murder me?" he asked.

Felipe hesitated. "Nobody," he said finally.

"Do you mean to tell me you did it on your own hook?" he asked, incredulous.

"Yes, sir."

"Where d' you get that pistol?" Stephens knew he did n't own one.

"I bought it."

"Where?"

"In San Remo."

"Who sold it to you?"

"The storekeeper."

"Mr. Backus?"

"Yes, sir."

A light began to dawn upon Stephens. Backus undoubtedly had a grudge against him.

"Did he put you up to this?" he asked.

Felipe was silent.

"Answer me; mind you, your life's at stake."

"Partly he did."

"Partly, you say. What do you mean? Who else?"

"Partly myself."

"You young scallywag! What did you want to kill me for?"

Felipe hesitated, but he felt the knee of the man who had him down begin to press harder again. "Because of Josefa," he said, with evident reluctance.

"Explain yourself, you idiot. Because of Josefa? Why, it was I who saved her. Don't you know that much?"

"You took her away," said Felipe sulkily.

"Of course I did, you ninny. What would you have had me do? Leave her with her father to be beaten to death? You're a plumb idiot."

"You need n't have taken her, though, for yourself," rejoined the boy.

"Oh, you make me tired!" said Stephens; "if that's all you've got to kill me for, get up." He released the young Indian, taking care, however, to retain possession of the belt and pistol and knife. Felipe scrambled to his feet rather unsteadily.

"I've a mind to boot you all the way back to the pueblo," said Stephens disgustedly; "not for trying to blow the top of my head off, though you deserve it for missing me at only four feet away, but for being such a loony idiot as to think that. By Jimini! I have n't got language to say what I think of you. Why, you—you—you galoot! when did you ever know me go to carrying on with any of the women in the pueblo? You ought to know me better by this time."

Felipe looked abashed.

"You all but did for yourself," he went on,—“that is, if you'd only known it; and I'm not sure that you have n't now. Why, I took her over from her family thinking to give her to you, but I'm dashed if I know whether I'd ought to now. There's too many blanked fools in this world already to make it worth while to help to set more of 'em going. However, we'll see what she's got to say about you. If she has a fancy for marrying an escaped lunatic, I suppose she'll have to have her way. Come, I'm going back to the fire; walk through that door there and we'll go in. Here, take your belt, but I'm dashed if you're to be trusted with a loaded pistol any more than if you were a three-year-old baby.” He raised the Colt above his head

and rapidly discharged the five loaded chambers one after another in the air.

It was the report of those shots that attracted the attention of the storekeeper far off on the hillside. The two entered the cave-dwelling, Felipe holding himself very stiffly as he moved.

"I don't wonder you 're stiff," said the American, observing him; "I must have pretty near squeezed the life out of you, and serves you right." He was still very angry.

"It is n't that," said Felipe, feeling his dignity assailed; "my shoulder is very sore; I have a bullet wound in it."

"The mischief, you have," said Stephens. "I suppose you got that from the cacique. I guess it must have hurt you some when I was mauling you just now." His voice softened a bit. "Of course I could n't know about that"; he was actually apologising already to his would-be murderer. "Here, bring it to the light of the fire and let me see it." Felipe squatted down with his right shoulder towards the blaze. "H'm, yes, an ugly place, rather," examining it carefully, "but it's been well done up"; he smelt it, "you've got that carbolic on it; good stuff for a gunshot wound, in my opinion. Say, where d' you get any round here?"

"Mr. Backus," answered the boy.

"Oh, from him. Seems to me he's been having a good deal to say to you lately. Who dressed this for you?" He replaced the bandage.

"Mr. Backus."

"Well, he understands gunshot wounds pretty well, but you take my advice and don't have any more to do with him for the present. He aint good company for

young gentlemen with no more brains than you—Hullo! what 's that? Did n't you hear something out yonder?"

A faint cry appeared to come from a distance.

"It sounds like a man," said Felipe.

The cry was repeated; it seemed like the word "Help!"

"Come on," cried Stephens, snatching his Winchester from the case and running into the darkness in the direction from which the sound seemed to come. Felipe followed him.

"Help!" came again more distinctly.

In another minute they were on the spot where the body of a man lay writhing on the ground face downwards. Stephens stooped and raised him, and beheld his enemy, Backus.

He let him drop on the ground again as if he had unexpectedly picked up a snake, and sprang back grasping his rifle at the ready. Could this be some infernal trap? Had Felipe been deceiving him?

"Did you lie to me?" There was a dangerous ring in his voice. "I asked you if you were alone, and you said you were, and here 's the man who 's your confederate, by your own confession."

"Before God, I did n't know he was here," cried the boy very earnestly. "What 's the matter with him? He 's dying."

"He deserves to die," said the prospector, looking down at him.

"Whiskey," moaned Backus brokenly; "I 'm snake-bit."

"Snake-bit, are you?" said the prospector, still suspicious. "Well, if you are that 's rather rough on you. Where are you struck?"

"In the face," said the wretched man. "For God's sake help me; this pain's maddening. I'm going to die."

"Lift his head up, Felipe," said Stephens, "and let me see the place. Great Scot! I should say you were snake-bit, and powerful bad, too," he added, as the young Indian lifted the head of the fallen man and turned it so as to show the face. It was a ghastly sight! The whole of the left cheek and side of the head were swollen out of all recognition, and the puffed and strained skin was so discoloured that it looked like a mass of livid bruises.

His first suspicion had been that the cunning store-keeper had set Felipe on him, and then, finding that the Indian had failed in his murderous attack, had adopted the heartless but too common ruse of shamming sick, in order to get his antagonist at a disadvantage. Stephens had sprung backward, and was standing now with his Winchester, ready at any moment to pump lead into his would-be murderers; but the awful condition of his enemy was proof sufficient that there was no sham about this case. Holding his rifle in one hand, he advanced, and with the other aided Felipe to raise the fallen man to a sitting posture.

"When did it happen?" he asked.

"Just now."

The stricken man's breathing was painfully laboured, and he spoke with extreme difficulty, so that it was hard to understand him.

"Have you any whiskey?" Stephens inquired.

"No."

"Have you done anything for it?"

"No."

"There's nothing you could have done that I know

of," said Stephens ; " I was thinking whether I could try to lance it for you, but I 'm afraid of cutting an artery. Of course, Felipe, it is n't possible that you could have any whiskey ? "

" No, indeed, Sooshiuamo," said the boy ; " how could I ? "

" No, no, of course you could n't," said the prospector ; " and I have n't any neither. If we had a quart of whiskey here we might be able to save him. The only thing we can do is to keep him moving. Look here, Felipe, you lift him under the right shoulder and I 'll lift him under the left ; we must walk him around. Now then, up ! " Between them they raised the unhappy man to his feet.

" Come on," cried Stephens, " hold him up. Steady now."

They walked forward as steadily as they could in the direction of the cave-dwelling, Backus staggering along between them. His legs went through the motions of walking almost mechanically, but his weight rested entirely on his two supporters, and he was a heavy man to carry.

" Stick to it, Felipe," said Stephens, " it 's the only chance for him. Keep him going." They reached the cave. " Set him down here a minute before the fire," said Stephens, putting aside his rifle, and with both hands lowering the patient to the ground, after spreading his blanket for him to lie on. Backus was in a state of appalling collapse ; the swelling increased so rapidly that it seemed as if his head must burst ; the inflamed skin was horribly mottled with red and green and yellow, and a cold sweat broke out on him. Stephens knelt beside him and felt his pulse ; it was rapid, fluttering, and feeble.

Felipe looked on, awestruck and speechless. That the prospector should try to preserve the life of his enemy did not appeal to him at all ; it seemed to him only one more of the unaccountable things these Americans did. But the frightful state of the store-keeper, and the agonising pains he was suffering were the work of the dread reptile he had been taught to reverence from his earliest days. The gods were angry with Backus, and this was their doing.

Stephens felt that the stricken man's hands were growing deadly cold. He sprang up. "Come on, Felipe!" he exclaimed, rising quickly again to his feet. "He's at the last gasp, I think. We must try to walk him up and down again. It's the one thing we can do."

They raised him to his feet once more, Stephens putting his right arm round his waist, and steadying him with the other, and, Felipe aiding, they walked him to and fro on the meadow, trying to counteract the fatal lethargy produced by the bite.

"He must have got an awful dose of poison into him," said Stephens, as they struggled along with their now nearly unconscious burden. "I guess it must have been a snake that had been lying up for the winter, and had only just come out now the warm weather's beginning. They're worst of all then ; their poison-bag has a full charge in it."

But Felipe made no answer ; he was not affected by the scientific question as to how many drops of venom there might be in a serpent's poison-gland. For him the question was, "Had the god struck to kill ? or would he be content to punish and pardon ?" But as he looked at the lolling head and dragging limbs of the victim he felt that the god had struck to kill.

At this moment the moon sank beneath the horizon.

"I guess he's come to the jumping-off place," said Stephens, as Backus sank into absolute unconsciousness. "Let's carry him right back to the fire."

Once more they laid him down beside that prehistoric hearth, and the ruddy glow lit up the horrid spectacle of his distorted face. They tried to warm him and keep the life in him a little longer; but it was in vain. The laboured breath came slower and slower; the feeble pulse waxed fainter and fainter; the chill hand of death was there, and nought that they could do was of any avail; and after a little while Stephens was aware that the thing that lay in front of the fire was but a disfigured corpse.

Between them, he and Felipe raised it, and laid it at one side of the dwelling, and covered it from sight with the blanket. When they returned to the fire, they stood there side by side gazing at the embers in a long silence. They stood as it were in the presence of death, and neither the white man nor the red had any mind to break the solemnity of the scene.

Suddenly there came a low, rustling, slithering sound from the stones in the corner behind them, as a large snake glided out across the floor, and swiftly vanished into the darkness without.

Stephens gave an involuntary shudder. "That brute must have been in the corner there all the time I was here," he said.

"Yes, Sooshuamo," answered Felipe in an awestruck voice, "he was there, but he did not touch you. Now he has gone to tell his brother who struck your enemy that he is dead. The snakes must be your friends; they do not hurt you; they only kill your enemies for you"; and as if impelled to penitence by

what he regarded as a supernatural warning, he turned to the prospector and poured out in a flood a full confession of all he had heard and seen and suspected of Backus's schemes, and of his dealings with the Navajos.

Stephens listened aghast. Mahletonkwa certainly had told him that his message to the governor had been stopped, but he had been loath to believe that a white man could play such a treacherous game, and side with savages against his own countryman. It was natural for the American to prefer to think that the Navajo had lied ; but, if Felipe spoke true, the wretched man who lay dead before them had really and actually sold him into the hands of the Navajos. Then arose the question—what had been his object ? There might be more dangers around, more plots that Felipe knew nothing of ? “ I never liked him, it 's true, but why should he play such a mean trick merely for that ? If he really did destroy my letters asking for the soldiers, he must have done it that very hour that I gave them to him. It was n't till the next day that I knocked him into the ditch, so he could n't have done it out of revenge for that blow I gave him. I wonder, now, if he could have kept a grudge against me for that old wound at Apache Cañon ? Some folks find it mighty hard to forgive.”

“ Well,” he continued aloud, addressing Felipe, “ I sha'n't bear any malice against you, young 'un. I reckon that—well—that fellow just used you, and you aint much more to blame than an idiot—pity you had n't got more sense ; but that 's enough—I 'll never think of it again.”

Felipe looked up at him with dumb gratitude in his eyes.

"And now," said the prospector, when the misunderstanding between them had been thus settled, "the morning star is up, and it will be dawn directly. We must take the body down to San Remo that it may be buried by his own people."

He went out to the meadow and brought up the horse and put the saddle on him. With no small difficulty they lifted the corpse on to it and made it fast there, and then, with Felipe at the horse's head, and Stephens holding the sad burden in place, they made their way back to the trail, and so down once more from the sierra to the village.

CHAPTER XXVII

AULD ACQUAINTANCE

THE sun was already well up in the eastern sky when the strange funeral procession entered San Remo. The news of the event spread like wildfire, and friendly hands were ready to aid Stephens in lifting down the dead man's corpse at the door of what yesterday had been his home, while kind-hearted women full of sympathy went into the house to break the tidings to her whose hearth was made desolate. Then a dreadful sound broke upon his ears ; it was the cry of agony that told that the wife knew that she was a wife no more but a widow. It was a piercing cry, that wounded the hearts of all who heard it, for the ring of mortal pain was there.

Unaccustomed to all violent appeals to feeling, Stephens found this heart-rending wail unbearable. Duty to the dead claimed him no longer, and he must hurry away.

"Thanks, friends," he said to the Mexicans who had aided him to lift the body down, "a thousand thanks for your kindness in this aid. *Adios, amigos*, I must be going. *Adios.*" He led the horse, now lightened of his burden, away from the door, Felipe following. He could not mount in the saddle which Death had just vacated; it seemed to him as if it would

be a sort of sacrilege. That agonised cry of the bereaved woman haunted him still. Loathing Backus though he did, this evidence that to one soul, at least, in this incomprehensible world, he had been all in all, struck home to him. Likely enough the man had been good to her, scoundrel though he was ; but what an amazing thing must be this bond of marriage that could thus link heart to heart, even when one of the pair was no better than a treacherous coward.

At Don Nepomuceno's he found Manuelita, but not alone. Not only were her aunt and Juana there—that was of course—but the visits of interested friends had not yet ceased, seeing that everyone naturally wanted to hear the exciting story from her own lips. And now it came the American's turn to entertain the company ; while food was being hospitably prepared for him, he had to come in and sit down among the ladies, and give some account of what had befallen him while searching for the bones of the murdered prospector. He passed over Felipe's attempt on his life in silence and merely spoke of having met him at the old ruined pueblo, where they heard through the darkness the cry of the dying victim of the rattlesnake, and vainly endeavoured to help him to resist the fatal venom. He told the tale at length, and with a freedom and fulness of detail that surprised himself. But all the time there was one thing present before his mind, and that was the very thing that he could whisper no word of to the eager circle around him ; it must be kept for one and one only ; but ever as he talked his eyes sought those of the Mexican girl, not once but many times, and they spoke to her silently and ardently.

“ What is it that has come to him ? ” she asked her-

self. "Here is a look in his eyes to-day that never was there before. Perhaps he has a secret to keep—or to tell; perhaps he has found that mine that he is always searching for." She blushed and looked down as she caught his glance flashed quickly upon her. Her heart told her that he had a secret to tell—but that it did not concern any mine of silver or gold. Again their eyes met, and again unwillingly they parted; it seemed dangerous to look longer, as if the meaning that they had for each other must betray itself to all around. And this was the man that she had been deeming cold and hard! "*Hombre muy frio*," as her aunt had called him. "Cold as the snows of his own frozen North," as her father had said—said it of him! Perhaps so, perhaps he had been cold, but if it were so, the ice had melted now.

Stephens lingered over his story longer than he had intended; questions flowed in upon him, and he had to answer them and fill in many things that he had omitted, for the storekeeper's strange and dreadful end was a matter that excited intense interest. He half hoped that by exciting their curiosity he might impel these people to go away and visit the house of the deceased in order to learn what more they could. Anything to make them move. But nothing seemed to have the desired effect. The more he told them the more they wanted to know. The chance to see the girl alone and tell her what was in his heart seemed to grow more remote than ever. He ached to speak to her, were it but a few words—a few words he told himself were all that were needful, so little did he know of love—and yet the opportunity was denied.

At last in despair he rose; he would go away himself for a little and then return. Perhaps meantime

the visitors might disperse. "I have to take my leave now, ladies," he said, excusing himself. "It is already the hour for the mail to arrive from Santa Fé, and I am expecting letters of importance. I do not know how they will manage in view of the unhappy death of the postmaster, but I had better be there to see what is to be done about opening the mail-bag. By your permission, then, Don Nepomuceno," and he bowed himself out. The words he had come to say to her were still unsaid. The thought occurred to him as he moved away,—should he speak to the girl's father? To speak to the girl's father first would be quite the correct thing according to Mexican fashions; or, rather, if he wanted to do the thing in proper style, he should go and get a friend to take a message to her father for him. But no; he was not a Mexican, and why should he adopt their fashions in this? He was an American, and he would woo his wife in American style for himself.

Faro started to come with him, but was ordered back.

"Stay where you are, old man, till I come for you. I see you're not so tender-footed as you were, but you stay here." He felt a sort of prejudice against taking the dog to the house of mourning. He hated to go there at all, but he had to have his mail and there was no other way to get it. And he would see if he could find out anything about the fate of the letters he had entrusted to Backus.

He went out and saddled up Morgana, who put her pretty head round and pretended to bite him as he pulled on the latigo strap to draw the cinch.

"Easy, old lady, now; come, none of that"; as she nearly nipped him. "Pedro's been giving you too

much of Don Nepomuceno's corn, I'm thinking, and it's got into your head." He slung his Winchester into its case under the off-stirrup leather, and swinging himself into the saddle departed on his errand.

The mail waggon had just drawn up as usual before the door of the post-office, now shut and locked, and the stage-driver was leading his team around the back of the house towards the stable as Stephens came in sight. Two passengers had dismounted from the waggon, and were stretching their tired limbs and looking disconsolately at the closed house with its shuttered window, which seemed to offer small promise of a meal.

Stephens loped forward with the idea of relieving their discomfort. As he did so one of the figures seemed strangely familiar. "Was it—could it be possible? No. Yes. By George, it was!" With a shout of welcome he sprang off the mare, slipping her bridle over the saddle-horn, and reached out both hands to the newcomer.

"Rocky! well, by gum!"

"Jack, old pard! why, you haint changed a mite!"

Stephens and Rockyfeller shook hands for about three minutes by the clock.

"Say," said Stephens, when the first greetings were over, "what brings you down here so sudden-like? Thar aint nothing wrong?"

"Not with me," answered Rocky; "I got your telegram, though, and it struck me that as you thought it worth while telegraphing for them dollars, you might p'r'aps be in some sort of a fix, so as I happened to be free and foot-loose I just jumped on the cars as far as South Pueblo, and took the stage, and here I am. And I was curious to see how you were making it down here. You're looking A-I, I will say. New Mexico

kinder seems to agree with you. Say, look at here,"—he dropped his voice slightly,—“how about them velvet-eyed Mexican señoritas? Aint none of them been too much for you yet?” He gave his former partner a rallying look as he spoke.

“Ah, I may have a word to say to you about that presently,” rejoined the other in a guarded tone. “But say, you ’re going to stop here, aint you? You ’re not bound for Wingate?”

“No, of course I ’m not,” laughed Rocky, “not unless you turn me adrift. I ’ve come down to see you—that is, if it ’s quite convenient.” It was characteristic of Rocky that it only now occurred to him that if his former partner had started an establishment down here a casual visitor might be *de trop*. “Of course,” he added hastily, “I can go on to Wingate with the stage, quite well, along with my friend here, Doctor Benton. Excuse me, Doctor,”—he turned to his fellow-traveller, who had been regarding the meeting of the two old friends with no other interest than considering how it affected his chances of getting a meal,—“allow me to introduce you two gentlemen. Doctor, this is my old friend, Mr. John Stephens, at present a resident of this neighbourhood. Jack, this is Doctor Benton, who is doctor to the Post at Fort Wingate and is now on his way there.”

The army doctor and the prospector exchanged greetings.

“Perhaps, Mr. Stephens,” said the doctor, who was uncommonly hungry, “you can inform me of what I am anxious to discover, namely, what possibility there is of our getting a meal here before proceeding.”

Stephens explained that the keeper of the stage station had just been killed by a rattlesnake. “But I

think," he continued, "that if you will put yourself in my hands I can manage to procure you a meal with some friends of mine near here. I'd like to ask you to come up to my place at Santiago, but the stage don't wait but an hour here, and there would n't be time, as it's a good three miles off." He paused and hesitated for a moment. "I should like to say that these friends of mine are Mexicans," he added; "there are no Americans resident in this part of the Territory." The fact was, that he felt slightly embarrassed for two reasons. He was afraid that Doctor Benton would try to offer payment to Don Nepomuceno for his meal, which would n't do at all; and he wanted to explain to Rocky his footing in the house, and his position with regard to Manuelita, before taking him there, so as to shut off beforehand any further unseasonable jests about velvet-eyed señoritas. But to explain this to him before a stranger like Doctor Benton was an impossibility. He must contrive somehow to get a chance to speak to Rocky for a few minutes alone.

His eye fell upon Felipe, who had followed him from the Sanchez house. "See here, young 'un," he said, "I wish you'd go back to Don Nepomuceno's for me, and tell him, with my compliments, that two friends of mine have just come, and that by his permission I should like to bring them to his house, and that I should be very much obliged if he could give them something to eat. Off you go. We'll follow you."

Felipe was off like a shot.

"That'll be all right now, I guess," said Stephens, looking after his retreating figure, "but if you'll excuse me a moment, Doctor Benton, before we follow him, I've got to see about my mail first. I expect there may be something of importance for me, but I

feel there may be a little difficulty about getting it, seeing that the responsible postmaster's dead, and the poor woman in yonder,"—he dropped his voice slightly,—"who represents him now, is in no condition to transact business. I guess I'll go and speak to the stage-driver first. Will you come around with me, Rocky?"

"Why, the mail-bags are in here," cut in the doctor, pointing to the stage, "and the driver never has the key. You'll have to get it out of the widow, somehow, I expect."

"Ah," said the prospector suddenly, a fresh idea flashing across him, "you might be able to tell me perhaps about one thing that I'm curious to know. You are just from headquarters at Santa Fé, Doctor, are n't you?"

The doctor nodded assent.

"Well, do you know of any detail of soldiers being despatched in this direction to look after the Navajos? There's a band of Navajos have left their reservation, and there was very serious trouble with them here some four days back, and I wrote to the governor and the general who is in command of the troops at Santa Fé to ask for protection for the citizens here. I wrote by the last mail that went in from here on this same stage, driven by this man. I know that he must have delivered a letter I gave him addressed to the First National Bank of Santa Fé, because I had enclosed in it a telegram to my old pard here, and the bank forwarded it to him all O. K. But I'm a little doubtful as to what became of those letters to the governor and the general. I want to know why those soldiers were n't sent."

"Hm-m," said the army doctor; "it so happens

that I was conversing with both Governor Stone and General Merewether only yesterday before starting, and we were talking about the route by here to Wingate, and the difficulty of the Rio Grande being in flood, but they never said a word about any report of trouble with the Navajos."

"You don't say!" said Stephens; "and you did n't pass any troops on the road anywhere along?"

"Certainly not," said the other; "in fact, if any troops had been coming this way, I should probably have accompanied them. But I am in a position to state that no detail of troops of any kind has left Santa Fé for a week or more."

"Well, I 'm dashed!" said the prospector; "they would have said something to you about it, sure, if they ever got my letters." He was silent.

"Mahletonkwa must have told the straight truth for once in his life," he reflected, "and that rascal of a postmaster must have actually had the face to burn those letters I gave him, and, what 's more, now he 's dead we 'll never prove it on him in God's world. Not that it would be any use if we could. The mischief 's done now so far as he could do it, but it 's the last he 'll ever do, sure. The letter I gave the stage-driver was all right. He could n't get at that."

Stephens never knew how near his letter to the Bank, with the telegram for Rocky, had come to sharing the fate of the others. But the stage-driver, though he might talk and bluster, had no real motive for destroying it, and he did have a healthy fear of the Post-Office Department. Mr. Backus had a motive, and did not share the other's wholesome dread of his official superiors.

While Stephens was pondering over the fate of his

letters, he slipped one hand in an absent-minded way into his side pocket, and there he stumbled on exactly what he most wanted at that moment, a good excuse for taking Rocky apart. The first thing his fingers had encountered was the paper containing the specimens of the outcrop at the Lone Pine rock that he had brought away with him. Excellent! here was the very thing; he produced it somewhat mysteriously, and handing it to Rocky, said apologetically to the other man, "One moment by your leave, Doctor, if you please. There's something here I want just to have my old partner look at," and he drew Rocky a little to one side.

"Why, certainly," said the Doctor, turning round and proceeding to climb into the stage; "I'll just see if I can rout out that mail-bag for you before the stage-driver comes."

"I wanted to tell you, Rocky, about my friends at this house where I'm taking you," began Stephens hurriedly, in a low voice; "I don't want you to make any error: there's a girl there that I think—" But his ex-partner, who had already opened the paper, interrupted him with the greatest excitement.

"Why, burn my skin!" he exclaimed, "do you know what you've got hold of here? You've got some of that same ore they've gone crazy over up at Mohawk. Did n't you spot the horn silver in it? If you've got a good lode of this stuff, by thunder, you've got a soft thing! Is it a good vein? If it's three or four foot wide you'll just have the world by the tail."

"That so?" said his friend, "you don't say! I guess I must have stumbled on to that hidden mine of the Indians I've been hunting for, at last. But that'll keep."

Rocky, remembering his old friend's former ardour in prospecting, was amazed at the cool way in which he took the news that he had made this highly valuable strike.

"Look at here, Rocky ; the thing I was really aiming to say to you," continued Stephens, his colour rising as he spoke, "was about that young lady,"—at this Rocky's lips curved into a knowing smile and his eyes twinkled ;—"don't laugh, old man, I 'm dead in earnest over this thing, and I think a heap of her. She 's a lady, mind you, right down to the ground."

"Why, to be sure, she must be," cut in Rocky, with portentous seriousness, though his eyes danced with merriment ; "she would n't be your style no other way. You always was high-toned, Jack ; I 'll say that for you."

"That 's all right," returned Stephens, colouring more furiously than ever ; he knew he was blushing, though the experience was entirely strange to him, and he was dreadfully ashamed of not being able to help it. "But indeed I 'm not joking, Rocky. Her family 's not very rich, but they 're kind of way-up people, I want you to understand, old Spanish blood and that sort of thing ; not any of the low-down, half-caste Indian stock, you know."

"That so ?" said Rocky, keenly ; "wal', I 'm glad to hear it. I thought Mexicans was all one quality straight through—leastways, all I ever seen were." Rocky's knowledge of the race was limited to the bull-whackers of the big waggon-trains on the freighting roads, and Mexican stock was considerably below par by his estimate.

"That 's where you got off wrong," said Stephens eagerly, "for there 's a few families here in New

Mexico that 's just as good as anybody, if it comes to that—Bacas and Armijos and—and Sanchez—” he hesitated a little.

“ Say,” cut in Rocky, “ look at yonder ! Who are them ducks a-coming up the road ? They 're riding as if all blazes was loose. Some of the First Families of New Mexico, eh ? ” Rocky was sarcastic. He knew Indians when he saw them.

“ By George ! ” exclaimed Stephens in considerable excitement, “ it 's those accursed Navajos back here again.”

Out of a whirling cloud of red dust and flying horsehoofs emerged the well-known figures of Mahletonkwa, Notalinkwa, and the rest of the gang. They reined up before the shut door of the store, and most of them sprang off their horses.

“ They 've not gone back to their reservation,” said Stephens indignantly. “ We 'd ought to have had the soldiers here by now, and put them right back. I 'm all for doing things by law and order, me, and it 's the soldiers' business anyway. But it 's getting to be time something was done. It 's an infamous shame they should be allowed to fly around like this and bulldoze everybody ; and, what 's more, I 'm getting tired of it.”

The Indians were talking and laughing in a loud, excited manner, and Mahletonkwa began to pound on the closed door of the store with his fist.

“ That 's a sockdologer,” said Rocky, “ him knocking at the door I mean, with the eagle-feathers in his head-dress.” Mahletonkwa was a big man physically ; his stature would have been remarkable even in a crowd of Western men, perhaps the tallest men, on an average, of any on the face of the globe. “ Say, do

you mean to tell me that these are wild Indians, and you leave 'em around here loose ? ”

“ They 're worse than wild Indians just now,” said Stephens, whose eyes were beginning to glow like hot coals ; “ they 're Indians with liquor enough in them to make 'em crazy for more, and ready for any devilment.”

“ Say, Mahletonkwa,” he called out, raising his voice and advancing a step, “ quit that hammering, will you ! There 's trouble in the house, and you must n't disturb them.”

The Indian took no more notice of him than a striking clock might have done, but went on pounding with loud, continuous blows on the resounding wood.

“ Stop it, will you ! ” cried Stephens, springing forward ; “ don't you hear me ? There 's a dead man in there, I tell you, and a poor woman mourning.”

“ I want more whiskey,” said Mahletonkwa excitedly, and he beat the door with both hands.

The next moment Stephens had him by the shoulders and whirled him around, and with a push sent him staggering half a dozen yards from the house.

The Indian recovered himself, wheeled sharp round, and with a yell of rage drew his knife and bounded upon Stephens. He, too, drew his to defend himself, but as he did so Rocky sprang between them, pulling his Derringer. Alas ! the Indian's knife was quicker than the pistol ; he grappled Rocky instead of Stephens, and stabbed him in the breast. Down went Rocky with a crash upon the ground, the pistol dropping unfired from his nerveless fingers, and the blood poured from his mouth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ELEVEN TO ONE

AT sight of Rocky bleeding at his feet, something seemed suddenly to snap in Stephens's brain, and the secret rage that had been consuming him for days blazed out. This was open war at last, and the Navajos themselves had begun it. It was their own choice.

"So now then," said he, "they shall have it."

Almost before Mahletonkwa could draw his dripping blade from his victim's body, the American's strong grasp seized him and swung him violently round. Stephens's right hand gripped the hilt of his great hunting-knife, and with it he dealt the red man one terrible stroke as with a sword. All the strength of his arm and all the wrath of his soul went into that mighty sweep of the blade, and he felt the keen edge shear right through bone and muscle as it clove the doomed man's breast asunder and split his heart in twain. The dying yell of the Indian rent the air with so piercing a sound that the women in the Sanchez house, three furlongs off, heard it, and sprang trembling to their feet. With both his hands the American raised his stricken foe aloft and flung him clear away, a corpse before he touched ground.

It was all over in five seconds ; but Stephens **knew**

it could not end there. This was no final blow in a single combat, it was rather the first in one where the odds were still ten to one against him. Mahletonkwa's followers were swiftly unslinging their guns, save four who had sprung to their horses, whether to fight or fly he could not tell. Like a flash the American's ready six-shooter was out from his belt. Notalinkwa was nearest him, his gun already at his shoulder ; but the too careful Indian paused a moment on his aim to make sure, and that pause was fatal. As the American's pistol came up level the hammer fell, and Notalinkwa, shot through the heart, pitched heavily forward, and lay there prone on the brown earth, biting it convulsively in the strong death-agony.

With the rapidity of lightning the deadly weapon spoke again, and again, and again, and as each jet of smoke and flame leapt from the muzzle, each bullet, true to its mark, laid an enemy low. If Stephens thought at all during those breathless seconds in which he sent foe after foe to his last account, it was but to say to himself, " Quick, now, quick ! Be quick, but sure ! "

Navajo rifle-balls whistled by him, but he felt no fear; there was no room for that, for his whole soul now was bent upon one passionate purpose,—to kill, kill, kill.

As the fourth Navajo dropped to his fourth shot, he saw the rest run, and gave one wild shout of triumph, and even as his voice rang out his fifth barrel went off, and down dropped yet another of the gang. It seemed as though he could not miss a single shot to-day.

" Oh, Doctor," he cried, " oh, Doctor ! quick here, Rocky's hurt ! " but he did not turn his head as he shouted to him to help his wounded friend.

The four Indians who had already mounted were off

and away, and Kaniache, the last of those who had turned to fight when Mahletonkwa was slain, had now lost heart and was springing to horse to follow them. What chance was there to fight against a man like this, on whom no Navajo rifle-balls seemed to have any effect, but whose own unerring bullets slew a victim at each shot? He was no mere man, but an avenging fury.

Alas for Kaniache ! the resolve to fly came too late. As he reached the saddle Stephens raised his six-shooter for the last time, and the foresight came into the V-notch of the hammer just below the red man's shoulder blade as he turned to flee. The last of the six cartridges spoke, once more the jet of flame and smoke leaped from the muzzle, and Kaniache dropped forward on the neck of his steed, clutching blindly and desperately at the mane. The horse bounded forward after the others that had fled before him, his rider's hot blood pouring down his withers, and dropping on to his knees at every stride. Then the desperate clutch relaxed, and the death-stricken Kaniache pitched heavily to the ground, and with loose rein the riderless steed galloped wildly across the plain.

"Hurrah," shouted Stephens again as he darted to his mare, "hurrah ! Run, you dogs, run !"

The sweetest moment in a man's life is when he looks in the eyes of his mistress and knows that his love is returned ; the proudest is when he sees in front of him his foes, but sees nothing but their backs. And to Stephens both these things came in one hour.

He raised the rein, and Morgana bounded forward in pursuit. His eye glancing around fell upon the figure of Doctor Benton just leaping from the stage waggon, pistol in hand. He had heard the rapid shots

before he heard Stephens's shout, and his first impulse had been to catch up his weapon and take his share in the fighting. But so quick had been the deadly work that there was no one for him to turn loose on save the dead or dying redskins who bestrewed the ground, and he paused as if undecided what to do.

Stephens settled the question for him.

"Hurry up, there, Doc," he shouted over his shoulder to him, "hurry up, or Rocky 'll be dead." And looking back he saw the army surgeon run across to where the prostrate white man lay.

Seeing this, he was satisfied skilled hands would do all that was possible to save his old partner. For himself there was only one course, to go on right to the bitter end as he had begun, and avenge on the whole murderous gang the wanton knife-stroke of their chief,—ay, and more, to avenge upon them, too, the terrors of Manuelita, and the murder of that lonely wanderer in the mountains whom he and the whole lot of them had so foully done to death beside the Lone Pine. For all that long account, vengeance should be taken to the very last drop.

He looked ahead : the four fugitives were galloping a quarter of a mile in front of him, making not for the sierra, but for the more open valley of the Agua Negra. He was clearing the last of the San Remo houses now, and as he did so he heard the thunder of horsehoofs on his right, and two well-mounted Mexicans dashed forth from the corrals to join in the pursuit. They were the same young men who the day before had ridden in ahead of Don Nepomuceno's party to rejoin their sweethearts. They had heard the firing begin, had seen the fray, and mounted in hot haste to play their part.

"*Bueno!*" he shouted when he saw them, "*bueno*, boys! Wade in. We'll give 'em a dose of it between us."

The Mexicans cheered back to him, and plied their quirts; Morgana was going at three quarters racing speed, but they sent their horses along from the start as if they were running a quarter-mile dash. The house from which they came was a little to one side of the Indians' line of flight, and they made for their line at such an angle that they gained a decided advantage both on them and on the American, and were enabled to cut ahead of the latter. The fugitives, hearing the shouts, and looking back and becoming aware of these new pursuers, at once began to flog, but the rearmost Navajo's horse could not answer to the whip, and the tremendous pace at which the Mexicans had started carried them right up to within fifty yards of him.

Out came their revolvers, bang, bang, bang! they went at him, and again, bang, bang, bang! But such wild firing as this over the heads of galloping horses is random work at best, and the Navajo went on scathless.

"*Esperate! Esperate!*" sang out Stephens from behind. "You're wasting your ammunition. Wait till you're closer, boys." But in spite of his wiser counsels he still heard them firing away, bang, bang, bang!

Young blood soon gets hot in the chase; and then Stephens saw a curious sight. Bang went the leading Mexican's revolver once more, and this time the bullet, better aimed or more lucky, found its mark. The Navajo's horse was seen to stagger and stumble and then come down, the rider leaping nimbly off over its head; he lit on his feet like a cat, and he held his bow and some arrows in his left hand; in the twinkling of an eye he was ready for them, and as the Mexicans

rode headlong at him he slapped an arrow into the first and brought him heavily to the ground ; like lightning a second arrow was fitted to the string, and he let fly again, and the arrow buried itself to the feather in the breast of the second man's horse, and horse and rider both fell almost on top of him. The Navajo caught the rein of the first man's horse with which to resume his flight, while the second Mexican was still struggling with his fallen steed ; and so marvellously quick and adroit was he that he must have succeeded in getting away but for the American. The moment Stephens saw the arrow-stricken horse roll over, he drew rein, and in half a dozen strides brought his mare to a standstill. He would not jerk her on to her haunches, for he was saving her strength for what promised to be a long chase. Before she had actually stopped he was on the ground, rifle in hand, and ready to shoot. Then, as the Indian was bounding to the saddle of the captured horse, the deadly rifle came up, and the momentary poise of the bent body, as he threw his leg over, gave to the marksman the fatal opportunity. The rifle cracked, and the conical bullet tore clean through the Navajo's vitals and passed out at his right breast. His dexterous manœuvre had been all in vain, and he fell forward under the horse's feet, and his spirit took flight to join that of his slain chief who had gone so little before him.

Stephens leaped into the saddle again, and galloped up. The unwounded Mexican had freed himself unhurt from his prostrate mount, and was now trying to draw the arrow from his friend.

"Go on, you," he cried to Stephens as the latter checked his speed, "go on, you, and kill *los demonios*, kill them all." The American took him at his word,

and away darted Morgana again in her stretching gallop. There were only three redskins left now, and they were some distance ahead, but the gallant little Morgan mare pressed steadily after them. The foam flakes began to fly from her bit, but she was full of spirit and going strong. He glanced down at his waist and saw the bright copper tops of the row of unused cartridges that encircled it. Stephens was one of those men who grow cold as they grow hot. His brain was like molten metal under a crust of ice. Shifting reins and rifle into one hand, he composedly felt the belt all round with the other ; there was but one vacant loop, and this assured him that there were thirty-nine more there in reserve.

"Seven Indians in seven shots," said he cynically ; "that must come pretty near making a record. Well, if I can only keep up that lick now !" His relentless eye measured the gap between him and his flying foes. With joy he noted that it was decreasing, for his whole soul longed to close with them and slay, slay, slay.

This blood thirst in him was a new thing. He had been in battles before, but he had never felt like this. The strained nerve, the hot fever of strife, the passionate will to win, none of these sensations were new to him, though he had not known them since the day of Apache Cañon. But when Coloradans and Texans met in conflict he had not felt as he did now. He had had no race feeling against foes whom he looked upon as Western men like himself. He had no personal wrongs to avenge upon them ; all he wanted was to send them back to where they came from ; to stop them from conquering the Rocky Mountain country and breaking up the Union ; in short, he only wanted to hammer them back into brotherhood. This was a

different thing ; now there was a fire burning in his veins that would not be satisfied till the last one of his enemies lay dead at his feet. It was not merely victory he wanted, but vengeance. The shedders of the innocent blood, that cried against them from the ground, should be utterly wiped out from the face of the earth. He would not leave one of them alive.

And ever the game little Morgan mare strode bravely along, and now his heart leaped to perceive that the Indians were losing more and more rapidly the advantage they had gained at the start. By this time there was distinctly less than a quarter of a mile between him and them.

"Good for you, Pedro," he cried, as he noted the gain the mare was making; "you did n't stint her feed last night. Don Nepomuceno's corn sticks by your ribs, little lady"; and at the sound of her master's voice Morgana pricked her ears and strode out more bravely than ever. He had not touched her yet with the spur.

Overnight Mahletonkwa and his gang had betaken themselves some little distance down the Santiago River to enjoy themselves in their own way with the illicit whiskey they had procured from the storekeeper, and there they had turned their ponies loose to graze. There was rich green grass in the moist swales along the river-bed, and their steeds had feasted on it. The young April grass tells its tale in a long gallop, and Stephens began to see that their horses were already in distress. He gave his bridle-rein a shake, and touched Morgana with the spur ; right gallantly she responded, and the gap now diminished fast. He was overhauling them hand over hand. He turned his head and looked back ; he could see for miles behind

him, but there was no one in sight. No doubt as soon as they could get together there would be many Mexican friends who would take up his trail and follow it, eager to help, but that could not be for some time yet. Once more it was his lot to play a lone hand.

And still the gap grew less ; the Indians looked back oftener and oftener, and their whips were plied mercilessly all the time. Only a bare hundred yards separated him from them now.

Stephens kept his eye glued to them, expecting them every instant to jump off and receive him with a volley. That certainly seemed to be the best game for them to play, as their horses were so nearly done. The question was, would they try it ? If they did, he too must leap off and shoot as quick as they. The Winchester, he thought, would give the three of them shot for shot and something over.

But to stand up to it and give and take shot for shot was not the Indians' style of doing business. They had no spirit left in them to face this terrible man in the open ; just here, however, the trail approached a spot more suitable to their methods of fighting. A bold and lofty butte, a landmark known far and wide as the Cerro Chato, rose abruptly a little to one side of the trail, and the Navajos suddenly swung off to the right and made for it, hoping to gain the shelter of the broken masses of rock that were strewn about its base, and from that vantage-ground defy their merciless pursuer.

Stephens divined their object the moment they turned for the butte ; he also changed his course, and he now spurred freely and spoke to the mare and encouraged her with his voice. The staunch Morgan blood answered to the call ; there was a spurt still left in her, and she fairly raced them for the rocks. But though she was

doing all she knew, the Indians got there first. They sprang to earth, and as they did so Stephens did the same, scarce fifty yards behind them. They darted for hiding to the cleft of rocks ; two got there, but one was too late ; just as he reached his goal the leaden messenger outwent him, and he felt the crippling blow ; it caught him in the thigh as he ran, and the broken limb gave way under him ; still, on his hands and knees, he dragged himself desperately forward almost into the longed-for haven of refuge, but another bullet, pumped up from the magazine, followed all too swiftly on the first, and broke his spine, and a third gave the merciful *coup-de-grâce* and put him out of his pain.

"There 's something mighty persuasive about a Winchester," jeered Stephens, hastily throwing in another cartridge as he rushed forward, and casting just one glance at the body as he passed. The persuasive repeating rifle had pumped lead to some purpose into White Antelope. Never again would he see the rich valleys of the Chusca Mountains where so often he had roamed with his tribe ; no more would he tend his flock, like the patriarch of old, and lead from pasture to water, and from water to pasture the spotted and ringstreaked herd of many-horned sheep whose innocent faces he knew so well. Here, under the Cerro Chato, coyotes and eagle-hawks would pick his bones, and the little booth of boughs where his squaw and his papooses waited for him—the little booth that to each wandering son of the desert stands for home—would never see him more.

War is cruel work. The renegade Navajo band had brought this on themselves, and richly deserved what they got, yet, take it all round, retribution, however just, is a butcherly job.

"Two more left, and I'm bound to rub it in," said Stephens, plunging in amongst the rocks lest the pair who had already found cover should take advantage of his exposed position outside.

Above them the butte rose abruptly to a height of two or three hundred feet, but the face of it was so much broken down that the fallen fragments had made a slope half way up it, while the largest detached blocks had rolled in numbers to the very bottom and lay confusedly heaped together or loosely scattered around.

"It's pretty near as good a place for these sons of guns as the Lava Beds," he said; "only, thank my stars, there are n't so many of them now. Yet I've got to go to work mighty cautious here, or else I'll give myself away for good and all." He wiped his streaming face as he crouched behind a rock for a minute or two to recover his breath and decide on the next move.

"Git 'em!" he went on, "I've got to git 'em, as the boy said; and there's no two ways about it. But how am I going to git 'em? that's the next question. If I stand straight up and try to walk right on to them, they're simply bound to have the deadwood on me. There'd be no show at all for me in that game. I've got to try and play it more their own style."

Very cautiously, foot by foot, surveying the ground on every side at each change of position, he began to move around. Dead silence reigned, broken here by no war-whoops as in the Lava Beds; the desperate red men were biding their time; hid in the rocks they knew their advantage, and reckoned at last to turn the tables on their pursuer with a vengeance.

The hot sun blazed down on him as the American

patiently crept from the shelter of one rock to another, but neither sign nor sound of his enemies could he detect. Out on the plain he could see that his mare had joined the horses abandoned by the Indians, and was making friends with them. They were getting over the effects of their gallop already, and were beginning to try a nibble at the grass.

"Make friends with them as much as you like, little lady," said he, apostrophising the mare; "it's all right for you, though I can't—at least not yet. There's eleven thousand peaceable Navajos living on their reservation that I'm quite ready to be friends with, but this band of cutthroats has got to be wiped clean out. 'Hit hard when you do hit,' was old Grant's motto every time, and I reckon he knew pretty well what he was about."

On he moved again, warily searching each hole and cranny where the great rocks had fallen against each other and formed shelters.

Suddenly, as he paused a moment in his advance, listening, there came to his ears from far away a welcome, well-known sound. It was the voice of a dog giving tongue on the trail.

"Faro, by all the powers!" he cried. "Why, he must have heard the shooting at the store and come a-running to see what was up, and then not finding me there he's taken the trail of the mare."

Straining his eyes he discerned a dark spot advancing over the plain; nearer it came and nearer, and then was heard a joyful bark of recognition as the dog rushed up to the head of the grazing mare and greeted her vociferously. But soon, not finding with her the master whom he loved best of all, he left her, and questing round he came upon his trail where Stephens

had dismounted to shoot, and again he eagerly gave tongue and came running towards the rocks. But at the body of White Antelope he checked.

"Now," said Stephens, standing with his back against a rock, with his rifle cocked and ready, "if those sons of guns lay themselves out to shoot him they 're bound to give me a chance to spot where they are, and I 'll see if I can't give them what for."

Keeping his eye on the alert for any move of theirs, he gave a sharp whistle. But the hidden red men, though they both heard him and saw the dog, would not take the risk of exposing themselves to his deadly aim, and in another minute the excited bulldog was leaping up and fawning on the master to whom he was devoted, as if to reproach him for having left his most faithful ally behind.

Stephens patted and encouraged him, making him understand that there was game afoot, and, warily as if stalking a deer, took him back to where White Antelope lay stiff and stark. As he smelt the blood again Faro growled and his bristles rose ; his master encouraged him till the dog knew what he meant ; the game they were after was not deer—it was men. He took up the scent of the two Navajos who had escaped into the rocks, and followed it with his hackles erect. In and out among the labyrinth of tumbled rocks he led the way, and Stephens kept up with him as best he could without exposing himself too recklessly. The trail grew hotter and hotter, till on a sudden Faro turned sharply aside and dashed out of sight behind a huge boulder ; instantly there followed his loud, angry bark, and a half-stifled cry of human rage.

With his rifle raised nearly to his shoulder, Stephens put his head round the angle of the boulder, to see an

Indian standing almost within arm's length of him with his back against the rock, angrily striking with his gun at the dog, who was baying furiously as he sprang from side to side to avoid the blows. Stephens had no time to look around to see where the other red-skin was, for at sight of him the Navajo, disregarding the dog, raised his rifle and fired, and the Winchester cracked almost in the same instant. So close were the two to one another that the burst of flame and powder smoke from the Indian's piece momentarily blinded the American.

"I must be done for now," was the despairing thought that flashed through his mind in the utter helplessness of loss of sight ; yet he felt no wound, and blind as he was he instinctively threw in a fresh cartridge for a second shot. Then his smarting eyes began to recover themselves ; hope came back ; he was not blinded ; he found himself able to see again, though with difficulty ; and there at his feet was the body of the Navajo and the dog worrying him. He flung himself on the pair to protect, if need be, his ever faithful ally, but need was none. His bullet had gone home, and the Navajo was sped. He dragged the infuriated bulldog from his prey.

"Luck 's all," said he, dashing the water from his eyes. "I don't know how I came to plug him so squarely ; I never even saw the sights ; I thought I was a goner that journey, sure."

He looked around with restored vision to try if he could descry the last of the gang, but there was no sign of him visible ; it seemed as if the pair must either have separated somehow before he and Faro came up to their hiding-place, or else the survivor had fled on his companion's fall.

"And that's lucky for me, too," said Stephens, "for he could just have socked it into me as he liked when I was blinded with all that powder smoke."

"Come on then, Faro," he continued, patting the dog, and encouraging him to take up the trail again. "One more, and our job's done. Hie on, old man, he can't be far away."

With eager pride the dog began questing anew for the scent, nosing inquisitively to right and to left, and Stephens, as before, followed him warily. They did not have to go far before the dog's stiffening bristles showed that the enemy was near. Three great detached masses of stone, fallen together haphazard, so bore against each other as to leave underneath a low, dark, cavernous recess, and into the mouth of this the dog dashed without a pause. The fierce sounds of conflict that instantly followed proved that it was the hiding-place of the hunted man.

For one anxious moment Stephens doubted whether to shoot or no, but standing outside in the bright light he could see nothing clear in the dark recess, and to shoot at random into it was to hazard killing his own friend. Then there came a loud howl from Faro, and unhesitatingly he drew his knife, dropped on all-fours, and laying the rifle aside threw himself head first into the cave, and in the darkness grappled for his foe. His left hand, thrust forward, seized an arm of the other, and swiftly in reply came the sharp, cold pang of a knife drawn across the back of it, and the warm gush of blood following the cut. As he felt the wound, his right hand instinctively let go of his own knife and seized the wrist of the hand wielding the blade that had cut him, the redskin frantically striving to get the hand free to deal him a fatal stab.

The two men had clinched for the death-grapple, and in their furious struggles they dashed one another against the sides and roof of the narrow cave. Dear life hung in the balance, and both knew it well. Stephens's left hand had no grip left in it, but he could use the arm to bear down his opponent, while his strong right hand held on like a vice to the wrist it had seized, and kept the deadly blade from being plunged into him. Mute as wolves they battled for the mastery ; the sweat poured off them like rain, and their breath came in short, hard pants. Then with joy Stephens felt that his right hand was overpowering his enemy's and with all his might he dashed the Indian's hand and the knife it held so violently against the rough rock wall that the blade snapped short off at the haft. One despairing effort the active red man made to twist himself clear, but in the narrow space his liteness was of no avail, and by sheer strength Stephens got him under and turned him on his face. A short moment they paused, exhausted and breathless, when suddenly the American released the other's wrist and clutched him by the throat. Writhe as he might the Indian could not throw him off, nor relax that fatal grip that was choking the very life out of him. Gradually he ceased to struggle, and Stephens knew now that victory was his ; with a final effort he raised himself on one knee on the red man's back, and quickly shifting the grip of his right hand from the throat to the top of the head, with a sharp, hard jerk and backward wrench he broke his neck. A convulsive quiver ran through his enemy's limbs, and then died away. The last of the renegade gang was dead.

Bruised, battered, and bleeding, the victor dragged himself from out the cave that had so nearly been his

tomb. The fight was finished, he had no enemies left, and he lay there weak and unstrung, his head resting on his blood-stained hands. "Why can't men be brothers?" he said. "But they would have it. They began. I did n't want to kill them. I wonder is Rocky dead? They 're all good Indians now, anyway."

A dead Indian is reckoned a good Indian throughout the West. He can be trusted not to do any mischief.

His strength returning, he drew out the body of Faro from the cave, and felt him all over; he had been dashed senseless against the wall of the cave and three of his ribs were injured, but his heart still beat; he was not completely done for.

"Worth a whole herd of dead dogs yet," said his master, gently rubbing the brindled back which at first he had feared was broken. "A blacktail buck has used you up as bad before now." He fondled his head, and the dog, coming to, made a feeble attempt to lick his hand. "We 'll find a way to tote you home, never fear, old man," he continued; "and it's odd if we can't scare up a nurse to fix you good when we get back."

He examined his own body; he was scraped and skinned by the rough rocks, and his shirt was torn half off him in the last struggle with the Indian; but except for the one severe knife-gash, which he carefully bound up, he had no serious wound.

He looked for his mare. She was grazing peacefully where he had left her, with her bridle trailing, as a hunter's horse should do. He looked away beyond her, far across the burning plain.

"I've played this hand alone," said he; "but I'm thinking it's getting about time for those San Remo folks to chip in."

And then in the distance, through the shimmering mirage that wavered before the eye, he saw a little cloud of dust arise like a travelling whirlwind.

He watched it ; it was not one of nature's whirlwinds, for it came straight on up the trail, fast and steady. Men made that whirlwind, and soon they were near enough to be distinguished.

It was Don Andrés and a strong band of Mexicans riding like the Old Harry to the rescue.

" But I played it alone, for all that," he said.

CHAPTER XXIX

PEACE WITH HONOUR

WHEN the death-shriek of Mahletonkwa startled the dwellers in the Casa Sanchez, the sound was so strange, so unearthly, that they sprang to their feet in terror. What new ill had fallen upon the village! That could be no human cry. It seemed to their terrified imaginations that some evil spirit from the other world had come to add a crowning horror to their troubles.

"It is the devil," they murmured, crossing themselves with trembling prayers—"the devil has come to carry away *el defunto*. *Que los Santos nos ayuden.*"

But when the blood-curdling shriek was followed by a succession of rapid pistol-shots and the cries of those who fell before the American's unerring aim, they knew that it was a conflict of a more earthly sort. The men snatched up their arms and dashed out of the house, ready for attack or defence, and were followed to the door by the trembling women, while Stephens's dog darted away on his master's trail.

This last alarm was too much for Manuelita. Her nerves were still quivering from the terrors of her own captivity, and now fears for her deliverer overwhelmed her. She knew the American was at the store,—he was surely killed; the blow that had threatened them

had fallen at last, not on the family but on their friend. She tried to run, but her trembling limbs refused to bear her, and she sank to the ground in a passion of sobs; brave she could be for her own danger, but not for him, not for the man who had just left her, whose eyes had told her a secret she hardly let herself guess.

She raised her head and heard the shuffling of feet, and the sound of subdued voices came nearer to her. In the doorway appeared her father, anxious and flurried. "Hasten, sister," he called in a loud half-whisper to her aunt, "hasten and make a bed in the room across the patio for a wounded man. The Navajos are on the war-path, and an American has been hurt."

"Who is it?" asked his sister, answering him in the same excited half-whisper, as the ominous shuffling steps of Rocky's bearers reached the outside of the door and paused. "Is he dying? Quick there, Juana, run and bring bedding; fly!"

Manuelita's heart seemed to stop beating as she listened for the answer.

"I know not who he is. They say he is a friend of Don Estevan's. He had but just arrived from Santa Fé. There is a doctor of the American soldiers with him. Mahletonkwa stabbed him in the lung."

Manuelita tried to ask, "And what of Don Estevan?" but her dry lips refused to speak the words. Her father answered the unspoken question.

"Don Estevan is like a raging lion. He has killed Mahletonkwa and half his band already, and he is chasing the rest. Ah, what a fighter! They say he fired off his pistol like lightning, and left the savages lying all around like dead dogs in a heap as if a thunderbolt from heaven had struck them. Ah, what a

fighter! The young men are all galloping after to help him."

"He is not wounded himself?" They were already in the room across the patio preparing it for the wounded man, and it was the voice of Manuelita that asked this question. Her tongue had found speech at last.

"Well, it is not known precisely," said Don Nepomuceno. "He started off after them like fury, and so did the two young Sandovals, and then there was more firing out on the plain, but it is not certain as yet what happened there. The doctor of the American soldiers wished to place the wounded Americano with us at once, and I did not wait. Ah, here they are, bringing him through the court. This way, Señor el Doctor. Here is the room for him. Is he much hurt?"

"Pretty bad," replied the doctor in Spanish, which he knew that Rocky, who was still conscious, did not understand. "But we shall see. With proper nursing there should be a good chance for him yet."

With gentle hands Rocky was laid upon the couch arranged for him, and attended to by the doctor and the women-folk, while Don Nepomuceno, in his eagerness to be of service, succeeded only in getting in everybody's way and making a wholly unnecessary fuss.

"Run, Juana, run. Bring a bowl with water for the doctor; cold water, mind you—hot, did you say, Doctor?—hot water, then, Juana, hot from the fire. And a towel, a clean towel, child—two towels; and be quick, quick! How slow you are!"

Rap, rap, rap, came loud, imperative knocks upon the outer door of the house, which had been made fast again after the limp form of Rocky had been brought inside. Don Nepomuceno flew to open it himself.

"Hush, hush! Who is there? Eh? What? Another man hurt? *Ave Maria purissima*, I hope it is not Don Estevan." His fingers fumbled with the bolts in his haste to unbar. "No, you say, not him. Who is it, then? One of the Sandovals shot with an arrow. And you wish for the doctor of the American soldiers to come and cure him? Come in, then, come in,"—the door opened as he spoke,—"come in and speak to the doctor yourself. Poor young Sandoval; an arrow right through his shoulder, you say. And Don Estevan was not hit? Oh, he killed the Indian that shot young Sandoval, did he? Ah, what a lion of a man! What a fighter indeed!" and bursting with this fresh piece of news he ran across the patio to tell the doctor that his services were in request for another patient.

"It looks to me," said Doctor Benton to himself, as, after doing all he could for Rocky's comfort, he hurried with the messenger towards the house where young Sandoval was lying, "at this rate, it looks to me as if I was going to get more surgical practice in San Remo in a day than I'm likely to see at Fort Wingate in a month."

The slow hours passed, and the hot midday sun blazed down on the village; even the dogs retreated indoors to find a cool corner, and the hens retired from scratching on the dust-heaps; the place seemed asleep, save where a few anxious watchers kept their faces steadily turned towards the mirage that flickered over the plain, towards the horizon beyond which the young men had disappeared. The shaded room where Manuelita sat by Rocky's couch was cool and silent and restful, but there was no rest in the girl's dark eyes; their

liquid depths burnt with a dark fire, and the scarlet spot on her cheeks, and the feverish start she gave at the slightest sound outside the door showed that she was not the impassive and self-controlled sick-nurse that Doctor Benton fondly imagined he had discovered, by some Heaven-sent miracle, in this remote corner of New Mexico. But whatever inward fire burnt in her eyes and fevered her cheeks, her hand never faltered in its task of fanning the sick man, and her ear noted his slightest breath. Yet, with the curious double consciousness that comes to us when the nerves are tense with strain, she was all the time far away—riding, riding, riding at speed over the dusty levels of the Agua Negra valley, up through the pine-clad gorges of the sierra, seeking everywhere for the form of a tall, fair-haired man—no, *Madre de Dios*, not for his corpse, not for that ! ah, no ! some instinct would tell her, some kindly angel would whisper to her, if that were true. But no, that could not be. He was alive, he was dealing death with that terrible rifle of his to the foe ; like an avenging whirlwind he was sweeping from the face of the earth those savages who had carried her off, who had tried to murder her brother, who had murdered that poor solitary prospector,—ay, and who could say how many more ? Merciful saints, what had they all not suffered from them ! And now a deliverer had been sent to them by Heaven, a very St. Jago, like their own fair-haired saint, with his bright armour, in the chapel.

And while she dreamed, and while her hand moved mechanically with the fan, her ear was still alert, and it brought its tidings. There was a murmur in the air, a movement without ; the village stirred, and there were sounds far off. She heard a shout, several shouts,

a shot—ah heavens, not a shot again!—yes, numbers of shots, mingled with *vivas* and cries of joy; it was a lively *feu de joie*, like that from the procession on the feast day of St. Jago himself. The shouts came nearer, they would waken her patient—oh, she must look one moment.

And, in truth, when she looked out it was a sight to see. The little plaza had fairly gone off its head with excitement; the women wrapped in their rebosos, and eager hurrying children, and grey-bearded men, too old now for work or fight, and unkempt, barefooted peons, all bustling and crowding together in one place, laughing and crying at once, and asking questions to which nobody made answer; and in the centre a party of mounted *caballeros*, their silver buttons and spurs glinting in the bright sunshine, shouting and firing off pistols, and yelling as if they were possessed.

“Peace, peace, *amigos*,” the voice of Don Nepomuceno was heard crying amid the babel of tongues; “a moment’s peace, I pray you. This is pure madness.” But no one heeded his words.

“*Viva! viva!*” yelled the young men; “here he is, behold him, the *guerrero* Americano, the slayer of the Indians.” And in the middle of them, his left arm in a sling, bloodstained, dishevelled, and in rags, sat Stephens on his mare; his brain was reeling; the intense energy that had possessed him in the hour of the fight had gone, and left him a worn and weary man.

Manuelita’s heart leapt at the sight of him. He was alive and, though wounded, he was able to sit his horse; his hurts, then, could not be desperate.

“Peace, peace, *amigos*,” reiterated Don Nepomuceno. “See you not that Don Estevan is weary to the death? *Santisima Virgen!* but you forget that he is wounded,

too ; yes, and look how the very clothes have been torn from his back.—Dismount, then, Don Estevan, and let me help you. Come inside, and you shall be attended to instantly.” His eye fell upon the Indian boy beside him. “ Here you, Felipe, run to the house of the Sandovals and see if the American doctor is there still, and tell him that there is yet another patient for him to attend to here. This way, Don Estevan. Excuse me, friends, you will not go till you have taken a cup of wine with me, but I must see to Don Estevan first. Ah, no noise now, for the sake of the sick man within. My house is purely a hospital now. Angels of grace ! but what agitation, what events ! This way, Don Estevan, if you please. Patience, friends. By your leave, I beg the silence of one little moment. Sister, sister, bring a change of clothes for Don Estevan ; his are all torn to pieces in the fight ; bring my best clothes, my feast-day clothes, out of the great chest in the inner room. Hurry, hurry ! And water to wash the blood from him. Bring water, Juana ; fly ! ”

Like a man in a dream Stephens got off his horse and entered the house. The Navajo bondmaid hastened in answer to her master’s call and brought water to wash the blood of her kinsfolk from the hands of the American. Passively he submitted himself to her care, and to that of Don Nepomuceno, who attended to him with bustling little airs of proprietorship, as if the prospector were his own private property, his own victorious gamecock who had won the main for him and beaten everything in the pit. He was so pleased with his office and proud of his guest that he hardly noticed how unlike the American was to his alert and masterful, everyday self. The transformation effected, he joyfully ushered him into the living-room. “ Dinner,

sister, dinner," he called out ; " a feast, we must have a feast. Andrés, some wine. Here is the key. Some of the wine of El Paso from the farthest cask. We must drink a health to-day."

But as he placed Stephens on the divan it struck him suddenly that the American looked strange. His face was white and drawn, and there was a dull, abstracted look in his eyes.

" Ah, my dear friend, you are overdone ; you are worn out with your heroic deeds. One little moment only, and you shall dine."

" You are very kind," said Stephens, sinking down on the soft seat, " but I could n't eat, thank you,—not yet."

" Ah, my poor head," cried the Mexican, " how I forget things ; you are so anxious for your friend doubtless. But he is doing well, very well, I do assure you. He speaks of you ; he says you are a millionaire,—that you have found the silver mine of the Indians. Oh yes, you shall see him when he wakes. My daughter is taking charge of him now. Yes, and the other wounded man, young Sandoval, is doing well too. There is no need of any anxiety. You must rest ; yes, rest, and eat and drink and be merry !"

Stephens seemed to rouse himself with a great effort. " Don Nepomuceno," he spoke with a dull, thick, voice, " I don't think I can stay now. I had ought to go right back to the pueblo. There 's some more business I have ; there 's a girl there, the cacique's daughter——"

" Ah, what need to remember her!" cried the Mexican with a sudden flash of irritation. " Of course I have heard—but what do mere Indians matter? Between ourselves, what does all that amount to? No-

thing, absolutely nothing." He snapped his fingers with contempt, as if to brush it all away.

"Yes, but look here, Don Nepomuceno, business is business. I've undertaken to run her show, and I'm bound to see it through. I took her away from her father because he was half-murdering her, and I want to see her safe married to this cub of mine here,—what's his name? I shall forget my own next,—oh yes, Felipe, that's it, of course—to see her married to Felipe. I'd better get it done right away, else I might forget, you know"; he looked around vaguely with an incoherent half-laugh, checked himself with an effort, and collected himself again. "If there was a padre handy, how about doing it here?—" He broke off confusedly.

Don Nepomuceno looked puzzled.

"But why trouble over these matters now? Any time will do for those Indians. But if you wish it, certainly I will send to the pueblo. You cannot go; you are overwheeled. You want this girl to come here? But no; I have a better plan. The padre is here in San Remo to-day, as it happens; let us send him there, and you shall be troubled no further by her."

Even Stephens's dulled brain could not but notice something odd in the Mexican's tone. "Oh, Lord," he groaned internally, "they all give me the name of it!"

"See here, Don Nepomuceno. I guess that Backus has been talking some about me. He's dead, but I've got to say it—he was a darned liar, anyway; and he knew nothing about this business but what he invented for himself. She's not my girl. I'm not that sort of a man." He stopped abruptly.

"Assuredly not," assented the Mexican with eager

courtesy. "You say so, and that is enough for us ; though, indeed, we are ourselves not always so scrupulous in these matters."

"Felipe bolted with her," said the brain-weary man, going over past events almost mechanically ; "her father took her from him ; I took her from her father, and I've promised to give her over to Felipe. He's a plumb idiot, but if she likes him that's her lookout. My business is to see them married and make it all square. When I take any business in hand, I can't rest till I get it done. I'll take you to witness, Don Nepomuceno ; I'll give them ten cows and calves on the shares to set 'em up in housekeeping."

"But certainly," exclaimed Don Nepomuceno, "your kindness is admirable. It is a deed of charity ! It was but last time his Grace the Archbishop of Santa Fé was dining with my cousin that he spoke of the admirable goodness of Doña Mariana Chavez in giving dowers to poor maidens. And now you will be so rich with the profits of your mine that you may dower all the Indian maidens in the pueblo if you like. In truth, such a deed must be pleasing to the saints ; it will fill our padre with admiration to hear of such a truly virtuous action, 'worthy of one of the pillars of our holy Church !'"

"Much more like the heavy father at the end of a play !" muttered Stephens perversely. "'Bless you, my children,' and down comes the curtain. I reckon I'm a bit young to play thè part. Hang it all ! I wish the old gentleman would stop."

Don Nepomuceno turned to the peon. "Here, Pedro, hasten ; ride to the pueblo, and take the old woman along and fetch the girl,—Josefa, you say ?—yes ; go, then, and fetch her and tell her she is to be

married at once. Say that those are the orders of the Americano. But first you can tell Rufino to go and find the padre—bid him hasten as dinner is served,” he rubbed his hands exultingly as his sister and Juana brought in the long-desired feast, and Andrés appeared with an old flagon which he had filled with El Paso wine. Don Nepomuceno poured some into a glass and offered it to Stephens. “Drink, my friend, drink; you need it, and we will all drink a cup in your honour.”

Stephens took the glass and looked with a grim smile at his own hand which held it. The hand was shaking like an old man’s. “I guess I’ve about wore myself plumb out,” he said. “You’d best let me go off to my own place and rest. I’m not good company just now.”

“No, no, you must n’t go,” cried the Mexican; “you shall rest in my house. We have more rooms than one. And behold, here is the American doctor now. In a good hour you come, Señor el Doctor. Sit you down, my friends, and eat. Sister, you and Andrés will entertain them while the doctor and I take care of Don Estevan.” And he took his unresisting guest apart into a quiet room where Doctor Benton might examine his wounded hand. Gently the rude bandages were undone, and Manuelita was summoned from her post beside Rocky, who was now sleeping peacefully, to wait on a new patient.

Bravely she looked on while the doctor cleansed the wound and produced his curved needles and silk and sewed up the gash.

“You’ll do all right so, I guess,” said he to the prospector when he had finished. “You’ve got to keep quiet, you know, and knock off whiskey.”

("Never touch it," growled Stephens, in an undertone.) "Right you are, stick to that,"—the doctor had a flask of old Bourbon himself in his pocket at the moment,—“worst thing out for inflammation. Well, you look as if you were in good hands here,” he smiled as he spoke. “I am going back to the Sandovals now. It’s a very interesting case that I’ve got over there. We don’t get arrow-wounds very often nowadays.” He folded up his surgical case with its wicked-looking little shining blades. “The stage has gone on to Wingate,” he continued, “and they’ll have to get along without me at the Fort for a day or two longer. I’ll be back again here in the evening and have another look at you and at our friend Rocky. You need n’t fret about him; the knife only just touched the lung; he’s going to get over it all right, though at the same time I think we’d best not disturb him now.”

“But you must not go till you have dined,” cried Don Nepomuceno hospitably. “Do me the honour to come into the other room and join our friends there”; and the doctor yielded to the request readily enough.

Don Nepomuceno lingered behind him for a moment.

“Now you must repose yourself, Don Estevan. Here you will be undisturbed. Manuelita is going to sit by the door and sing to our guests, and there is nothing more reposeful than singing. Take your guitar, my daughter, and sit here and we can enjoy it as we take our dinner.” He passed through the door as Manuelita slid the ribbon of her guitar over her shoulder and struck a chord.

She sang—who knows how the song had reached her?—words that had travelled far, and were first written in another tongue by a poet of another race,

but when she heard them they seemed to tell her a whole sad and beautiful history in the two short verses, and she found the plaintive tune of an old ballad that suited them, and sung them often to herself. Now, called upon unexpectedly to sing, the favourite words were on her lips almost before she knew what they were—

“ Solitario se alza un pino,
Del Norte en árida cumbre ;
Duerme, y con blanca cubierta
Hielos y nieves le cubren.

“ Sueña con una palmera
Que en el Oriente, allá lejos,
Se entristece sola y muda
En el ardiente desierto.”

The notes mingled in the tired American's dreamy thoughts, and through his unstrung mind coursed strange fanciful applications of the poet's words—

“ A lone pine stands in the Northland
On a bald and barren height ;
He sleeps, by the snows enfolded
In a mantle of wintry white.”

“ ‘ A lone pine ’—that 's so, a lone pine like that one over the prospector's grave. I reckon if that lode there turns out all that Rocky said I 'll have to call it Lone Pine. Suits me, too, the name does ; I 've always played a lone hand ; ay, and I know what the barren mountain heights are, if any man ever did, and many 's the time I 've slept on them with the snow over me for a blanket —’ ”

“ He dreams of a lonely palm-tree
Afar in the morning land ”—

“ ‘ He dreams of a palm-tree ’— no, that ’s not me, after all. I have n’t dreamt much. Yes, by thunder, I have though ! I dreamt some up in the sierra. I dreamt a lot of queer things by that old cliff-dweller’s fire I relit after I found the Lone Pine ; I thought this whole New Mexican country here was asleep, and that maybe I was the man to wake her up. Ah, and I thought, too, that I must have been asleep myself to have played a lone hand so long when I need n’t, when I might have had a woman’s love, and got some joy and happiness into life instead of toughing it out in solitude. I believe I ’ve been a blamed idiot.”

He listened as in a trance to the throbbing, wailing strings, while the sweet voice of the girl sang the last verse a second time—

“ He dreams of a lonely palm-tree,
Afar in the morning land,
Consumed with unspoken longing
In a waste of burning sand.”

By Heaven ! had she been alone too ? He almost sprang up to call to her, but it seemed to him he could not move. He stood on a lonely height under the pine-tree ; he looked down on the grave of the man who had died there alone, and far away in a vision he beheld San Remo and the Casa Sanchez ; and he saw more—he saw Manuelita. He could not break the spell and stand beside her there. He had had his chance, and now it was too late. He had dreamt through the summer, and now the winter had come, and its icy fetters bound him fast. Immovable on his crag he could only dream—dream of the happiness that might have been his, and long for it with a passionate desire that seemed as if it could burst the very mountains to let him pass,

and yet was powerless to bring him an inch nearer to the spot that he longed for. The numbness of despair came upon him, his bewildered thoughts sank deeper into dreamland, and the tired brain at last was steeped in all-restoring forgetfulness.

He awoke suddenly with a start, the room was empty; the subdued voices came to him through the open door, but the guests were gone. How long had he slept? For answer he saw the scarlet light of sunset glowing on the adobe wall across the patio.

He sprang up like a giant refreshed and looked around, while the memory of what had taken place began to come back to him. "I must have been here for hours and hours. Her singing was like a charm. But where has she gone to? I've got to find her again right away. Why on earth did I lie there like a log all this time? What have I been doing all day, anyhow?"

He looked at his bandaged left hand, and passed his right over his forehead, and as his brain cleared the whole of the morning's work came back to him like a flash.

"I had to kill them, but I hate to think of it now. It was a butcherly job. That's not the way I want to live. Yes, I hate it," he repeated, standing in the middle of the empty room. He felt an unreasoning repulsion when he thought of the light-minded crowd that had cheered him so wildly on his return from the slaughter, and had laughed and jested over it. "Killing men is a mighty serious matter, whatever they may think," he muttered gloomily, "but most of these folks don't see it in that light. She's different, though, and it's she that I want, and not her people. Now, how am I going to find her alone?"

As he stood there the faint whine of a dog caught his ear.

"Faro, old man! Think of my forgetting you and your wounds when there's no one to see after you but me! I must have been off my nut." He strode out through the door, and beheld in the adjoining room his dog snugly established on a pile of blankets with all the dignity of a spoilt invalid, and there, kneeling beside him, her glossy head bent over the bulldog's picturesquely ugly face, was Manuelita.

"I made the doctor of the soldiers look at him," she said, glancing up at the tall American with a shy laugh. "He was almost angry when I asked him, and said he was no doctor of dogs; but I made him do it"; and she gave another little laugh of triumph.

"I reckon you could make most people do what you say, señorita," he answered, but he did not echo her laugh. He stood there looking down at her, and as he looked a great peace seemed to descend upon him. The anger and the strain, the battle-fury and the revulsion that followed it, all seemed to pass away from his mind, and a reverent awe came over his soul as though he had entered into a sanctuary, a sanctuary where even his own honest love showed to him as earthly and selfish, whence every thought but one was banished, the thought of a woman inexpressibly gentle and good, with a tender heart for every living thing. With a sudden movement he caught her hand in his own, and hers so soft and innocent lay in his so lately red with enemies' blood.

He knelt on one knee, and bowed his head and lifted the captive hand to his lips.

"I am not fit to come near you," he said, "but unless I have you, I can never care for anything in the

whole world again. I am an uncouth ruffian, I know ; but if you will teach me, I will learn to be gentle in time. Will you try me ? ”

He turned his face to hers, her lips met his, and the compact was sealed.

FINIS





